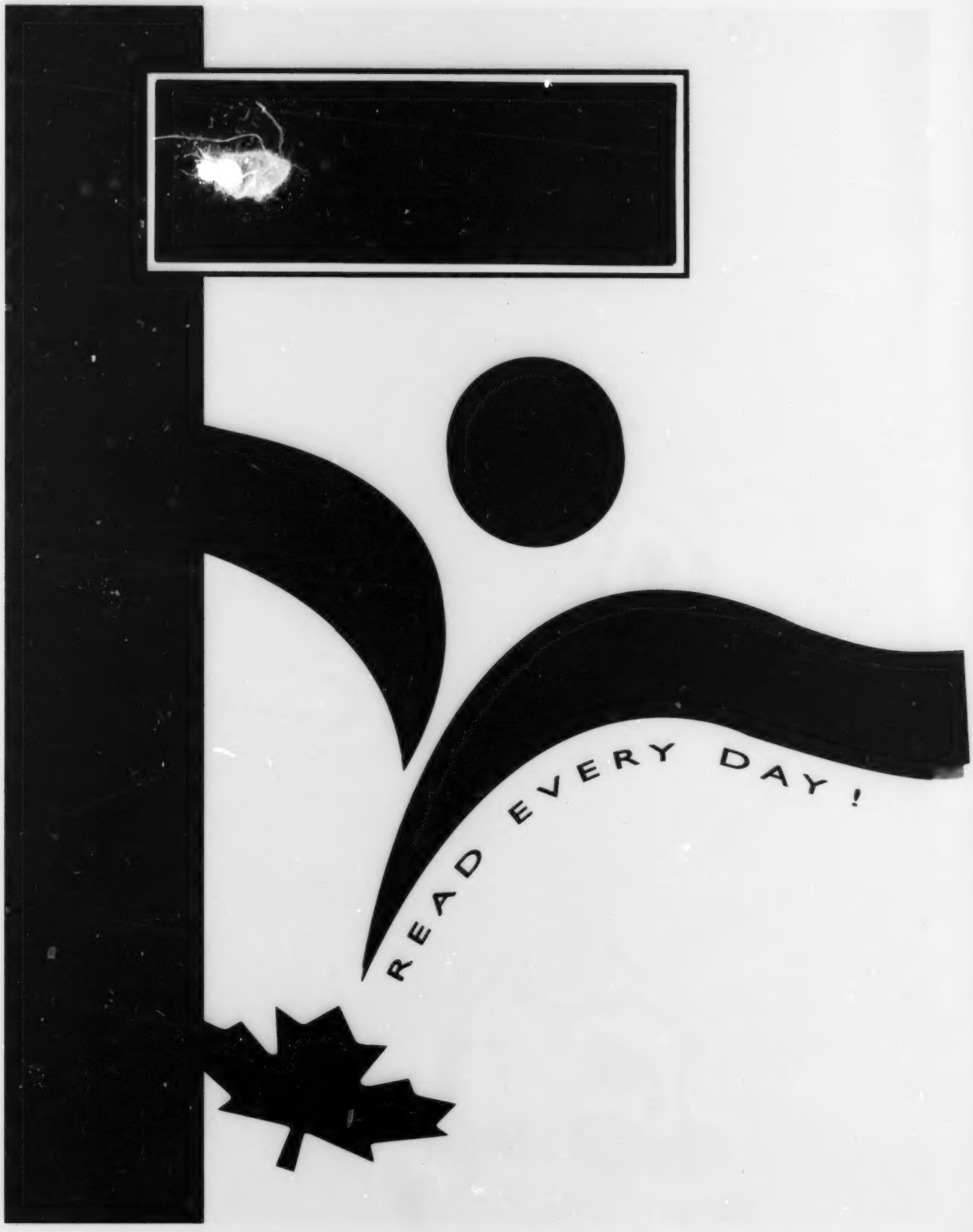
Human Resources Development Canada | Développement des ressources humaines Canada



National Literacy Secretariat

Le Secrétariat national à l'alphabétisation

Canada

Literacy and Literacy Training of Francophone Minority Groups in Canada

Discussion Paper

National Literacy Secretariat

Research and Writing: Sylvie Roy

Revision: Ginette Trudel

Graphics and Layout: Manon Lauzon

National Literacy Secretariat
Ottawa, 1997

Note to readers

The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the NLS.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACELF ..... Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française

ACFO ..... Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario

AFL ..... Association française pour la lecture

CAP ..... Comité d'alphabétisation de Prescott (Ontario)

CASP ..... Community Academic Services Programs

Centre FORA ..... Centre franco-ontarien de ressources en alphabétisation

ETS ..... Educational Testing Service

FANB ..... Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick

FCAF ..... Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français

FCFAC ..... Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada

FFHQ ..... Fédération des francophones hors Québec

IALS ..... International Adult Literacy Survey

ICEA ..... Institute canadien de l'éducation des adultes

LSUDA ..... Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities

MCL ..... Movement for Canadian Literacy

NAEP ..... National Assessment of Educational Progress

NLS ..... National Literacy Secretariat

OCL ..... Ontario Community Literacy

OECD ..... Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

RGFAPO .. Regroupement des groupes francophones d'alphabétisation populaire de l'Ontario

RGPAQ ..... Regroupement des groupes populaires d'alphabétisation du Québec

SAIC ..... Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes

FOREWORD

The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) is publishing this document as a contribution toward defining issues surrounding literacy and francophone minority communities in Canada. These communities, especially as revealed in the International Adult Literacy Survey, face some urgent issues with which the NLS must be concerned. The report recognizes the special role of Quebec in Canada's French-language community: Quebec-based organizations are in a position to offer support and inspiration for literacy initiatives in French elsewhere in Canada.

Since its creation in 1987, the primary objective of the NLS has been "to promote a variety of opportunities for people to improve their reading and writing skills, and to make Canada's social, economic and political life more accessible to people with weak literacy skills." Since direct provision of literacy training falls under provincial jurisdiction, the NLS acts as a catalyst by providing various resources for support to non-governmental organizations, and by assisting provincial literacy initiatives through agreements. Since its formation, the NLS has supported over 3,000 projects in Canada under the five components of its funding program: learning materials; research; improvement of program access and outreach; coordination and information sharing; and increasing public awareness. Many of these projects have been initiated by francophone literacy groups in minority-language communities, including local groups, provincial associations, the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF), and other national partners concerned with francophone literacy.

What is the state of French-language literacy and literacy training in minority communities? What are the trends driving, promoting or discouraging its development? Our objective here is to suggest to the literacy community some approaches that can lead to a clearer view of the situation and to the development of more effective procedures. Low literacy skills are an obstacle to the healthy growth of minority francophone groups. Thus, any activity meant to promote literacy and literacy training in French will have a beneficial impact for the future. The NLS hopes that in playing a coordinating role, it will contribute to the advancement of literacy in French in Canada.

I hope this text will generate a rewarding and productive dialogue among its readers.

James E. Page
Executive Secretary, National Literacy Secretariat

102-04393/

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Introduction 1

Part One
The francophone minority community environment in Canada 3

1.1 General data on the francophone minority communities 3

1.2 Data on educational attainment 7

1.3 Evolution of the concept of literacy measurement 10

1.4 Francophones and literacy measurement surveys in Canada 12

1.5 Some historical elements of the French literacy training movement 22

Part Two
Issues for the development of literacy training in French in Canada's minority communities 27

2.1 Ensuring the recognition and continuity of literacy training initiatives 28

2.2 Consolidating and adapting literacy training models 31

2.3 Improving literacy training practices 36

2.4 Continuing the training of instructors 39

2.5 Associating literacy with other issues in francophone communities 42

2.6 Enhancing research 44

2.7 Sharing responsibilities for literacy 49

Conclusion 54

Bibliography 55

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the Institut canadien de l'éducation des adultes (ICEA), the Regroupement des groupes populaires d'alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ) and the Fédération des francophones hors Québec (FFHQ)[1] launched a joint initiative to profile literacy levels among French-speaking Canadians and to suggest avenues of action for ensuring access "to education, the means of expression and tools for development which reflect their reality and allow them to realize their full potential."[2] This endeavour gave birth to the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) and to a new awareness of the urgent need to take action to improve the situation of francophones with low literacy skills. Since then, French-language literacy training in Canada has made some major advances, as evidenced by the establishment of infrastructures and programs (especially in Ontario and New Brunswick) and a proliferation of local projects. How far along are we today? How do we protect and expand what we have achieved? Those are questions that this report aims to answer.

In this document, we are proposing a framework for discussing the literacy levels and literacy training of French-speaking Canadians living in minority areas. The document is in two parts. The first part presents data that outlines the status of francophones in relation to literacy levels and literacy training. The second raises a number of issues that affect the development and success of literacy training initiatives in French. To explore these issues, we have included a series of questions that invite partners to develop their own responses. There are many questions. How should literacy be encouraged in French-speaking minority communities? What priorities have to be set for training, research, and models for organization and intervention? What are the partners' roles in maintaining and expanding literacy training activities among francophones? These are just a sample of the questions raised in the text that could be discussed by various levels of decision-makers.

---

1. In 1991 the FFHQ became the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes du Canada (FCFA du Canada).

2. Andrée Boucher (1989), *En toutes lettres et en français. L'analphabétisme et l'alphabétisation chez les francophones au Canada* (Montreal: Institut canadien de l'éducation des adultes) p. 11 [translation].

The scope of this document was limited by the terms of reference drawn up by the NLS. We do not claim to present an exhaustive picture of initiatives in every province, much less to explain their individual challenges.[3] This is at best a sketch of the topic: further reading will be needed to explore it at greater depth. In this regard, the bibliography at the end of the document offers some interesting references. Finally, we present more questions than answers, since it is up to every community to find its own answers. This text is in fact a kind of 'raw material' for debate. It still needs to be critiqued, supplemented, and reworked.

Several people had a hand in the conceptualization and writing of this document, either by taking part in a telephone survey in November 1996 or by validating the preliminary version. They are: Pierre Foisy, Luce Lapierre, Murielle Gagné-Ouellette, Joëlle Désy, Serge Wagner, Yvon Laberge, Jean-Yves Desjardins, Léonce Chiasson, Raymond Day, Roger Doiron, Thérèse Guillemette, Anna Vivas-Péres and Catherine Darveault. We wish to extend our warm thanks to them since their comments, enthusiasm and availability contributed to the success of this project.

Sylvie Roy

3. The 1997 joint FCAF-UQAM action research project will attempt a more detailed description of practices and policies in the field of French literacy training in Canada.

PART ONE

The francophone minority community environment in Canada

In this part, we present some statistical and historical data that sets the context for the issues discussed in Part Two of the document. First we report some figures on the development of French-speaking communities in Canada over the past 20 years. Next we comment on the data on francophones with less than nine years of schooling, comparing them both over time (1981 and 1991) and with the data on anglophones. We then discuss the evolution of concepts relating to measurement of levels of literacy, and describe the results of the most recent studies in Canada that assess literacy, focusing in particular on the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1994). We close with a few historical landmarks to place the French literacy training movement in Canada in context.

1.1 General data about francophone minority communities

Table 1 outlines the evolution of Canada's francophone population since 1971. In the 1991 census, 976,415 minority francophones made up the 15% of the French-speaking community of Canada that resides outside of Quebec. This number is higher than the total population of each of the provinces of Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan. Half of the francophones (503,345) live in Ontario, making them the biggest French-speaking minority in the country (even though they account for only 5% of the province's population). New Brunswick has the largest *proportion* of francophones, representing over a third of the province's population.

Researchers from the Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development have divided Canadian francophones outside of Quebec into 22 groups or regions for the purpose of drawing a more detailed portrait of their communities.[4] They found that the demographic structure of the French-language community in Canada is characterized by its duality: three French speakers out of four live in five groupings, designated *régions de souche* or core regions, while the rest are scattered across the remaining 17 francophone regions. The francophone populations in the core regions are more stable and usually more concentrated. However, their economic status and education are lower. The remaining francophones are more educated and more mobile, and work in urban English-speaking areas, making them more prone to assimilation. Of the 22 francophone groups or regions defined by the researchers, only four make up 20% or more of the population. The constituencies with strong

4. Maurice Beaudin and René Boudreau (1994), *État de la francophonie hors Québec en 1991* (Moncton, for the Comité d'adaptation des ressources humaines de la francophonie canadienne, FCFA du Canada).

francophone representation are New Brunswick, especially the north shore of the province (80%), southwestern Nova Scotia (29%), and eastern (20%) and northern (ie, northeastern) (22%) Ontario.[5]

Between 1971 and 1991, the absolute *number* of francophones residing outside Quebec rose 5%, partly because of interprovincial migration from Quebec.[6] However, Table 1 shows that their *proportion* of the Canadian population decreased from 6% to 4.8%. This is in part attributable to increased immigration from outside Canada, a phenomenon which has been most apparent in Ontario and British Columbia.

Furthermore, the francophone population outside Quebec is aging: the median age has risen ten years since 1971, from 27.6 to 37 years. The population of Canada has also grown older, though not as much.[7] The francophone minority population is older than the French-speaking population of Quebec: only 28% of francophones outside Quebec are under 25 years of age, in contrast to 34% for Quebec francophones.

---

5. For a description and economic classification of the 22 regions, see Marc Godbout (1995), *Plan directeur de la main-d'œuvre de la francophonie canadienne* (n.p., for the Comité d'adaptation des ressources humaines de la francophonie canadienne, FCFA du Canada), pp. 22-25.

6. French-speaking Quebec, for its part, saw an increase of 13% over this period.

7. The median age in Canada rose from 26.3 in 1971 to 33.5 in 1991.

Table 1
Population with French as mother tongue, Canada, provinces and territories, 1971-1991

	1971		1981		1991	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Prince Edward Island	7,360	6.6	5,835	4.8	5,750	4.5
Nova Scotia	39,335	5.0	35,385	4.2	37,525	4.2
Newfoundland	3,640	0.7	2,580	0.5	2,855	0.5
New Brunswick	215,725	34.0	231,970	33.6	243,690	34.0
Quebec	4,867,250	80.7	5,254,195	82.5	5,585,650	82.0
Ontario	482,045	6.3	465,335	5.5	503,345	5.0
Manitoba	60,545	6.1	51,620	5.1	50,775	4.7
Saskatchewan	31,605	3.4	25,090	2.6	21,795	2.2
Alberta	46,500	2.9	60,605	2.7	56,730	2.3
British Columbia	38,035	1.7	43,415	1.6	51,585	1.6
Yukon	450	2.4	530	2.3	905	3.3
N.W.T.	1,160	3.3	1,225	2.7	1,455	2.5
TOTAL CANADA	**5,793,650**	**26.9**	**6,177,795**	**25.7**	**6,562,065**	**24.3**
CANADA outside Quebec	**926,400**	**6.0**	**923,605**	**5.2**	**976,415**	**4.8**

Note: Multiple responses were distributed equally among the languages declared.

Sources: Statistics Canada, *Mother Tongue*, 1971 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-725; Statistics Canada, *Mother Tongue, Official Language and Home Language*, 1981 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 92-910; Statistics Canada, *Mother Tongue: 20% Sample Data*, 1991 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 93-333 [data taken from Brian R. Harrison (1996), *Youth in official language minorities, 1971-1991* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Demography Division)].

There has been a significant drop in the number of young francophones since 1971 in all provinces and territories except Yukon. The number of francophones under 25 years of age has fallen 35%, while the number of non-francophone young people has hardly declined at all outside Quebec. Table 2 indicates the number of francophones under 25 in 1971, 1981 and 1991, by province and territory. Note that the decrease in the number of young people exceeds 45% in five provinces: Saskatchewan (70%), Prince Edward Island (61%), Manitoba (52%), Newfoundland (49%) and Nova Scotia (46%).

Table 2
Young francophones residing outside Quebec, Canada, provinces and territories 1971, 1981 and 1991

	1971	1981	1991	Difference (n) 1971 to 1991	Difference (%) 1971 to 1991
Prince Edward Island	3,245	1,950	1,260	–1,985	–61.2
Nova Scotia	14,920	11,290	8,020	–6,900	–46.2
Newfoundland	1,585	1,050	810	–775	–48.9
New Brunswick	117,835	106,695	85,660	–32,175	–27.3
Ontario	219,800	183,800	144,930	–74,870	–34.1
Manitoba	26,580	18,375	12,800	–13,780	–51.8
Saskatchewan	11,600	6,785	3,450	–8,150	–70 3
Alberta	18,320	23,710	12,500	–5,820	–31.8
British Columbia	10,525	10,605	8,325	–2,200	–20.9
Yukon	125	145	230	105	84.0
N.W.T.	420	400	330	–90	–21.4
CANADA outside Quebec	**424,955**	**364,805**	**278,315**	**–146,640**	**–34.5**

Source: Censuses of 1971, 1981 and 1991, unpublished tabulations [data taken from Brian R. Harrison, *Youth in official language minorities, 1971-1991* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Demography Division, 1996)].

This accelerated aging of the population is connected to the minority status of francophones in Canada. It can be partly explained by the slightly lower fertility of francophone women,[8] but much more by the increase in exogamous marriages[9] and the attractions of English for young people. The percentage of young people living in a family where both parents speak French fell from 92% in 1971 to 74% in 1991. At the same time, mixed marriages were on the rise; switching from French to English is much more common among young people living in these families, although this trend has declined in the last 20 years.[10] Overall, 21% of francophones under 25 choose English as their language of preference. This transition is more evident among those in their early twenties. Language transfer varies according to the concentration of francophones. As shown in Table 3, it is low in New Brunswick (5%) and very high in British Columbia (51%), Alberta (48%) and Saskatchewan (48%); in Ontario, nearly a quarter of young francophones choose English. Other data confirms the disturbing phenomenon of assimilation of minority francophones: only 64% of francophones say they speak

8. According to demographers, a population's replacement level requires a fertility index of 2.1. The index for francophone women was 1.6 during the five years preceding 1991, for anglophone women 1.7, and for allophone women 1.8.

9. Mixed or exogamous marriages are those in which the spouses are of different religions or ethnicities.

10. In mixed couples where the mother is francophone, the proportion of children adopting French as their mother tongue rose from 10% in 1971 to 18% in 1991 (23% if multiple responses are included).

French at home (70% if multiple responses are accepted).[11] Exogamy and level of demographic concentration are factors often cited by researchers to explain transfer from French to English.[12]

Table 3
Language transfer from French to English, young francophones outside Quebec, Canada, provinces and territories

Province	Percentage
Prince Edward Island	25.8
Nova Scotia	23.4
Newfoundland	35.2
New Brunswick	5.1
Ontario	23.6
Manitoba	36.8
Saskatchewan	43.5
Alberta	48.4
British Columbia	50.5
Yukon	26.1
N.W.T.	34.8
CANADA outside Quebec	**20.7**

Source: Statistics Canada, *Language Retention and Transfer*, 1991 Census of Canada, Catalogue No. 94-319 [data taken from Brian R. Harrison (1996), *Youth in official language minorities, 1971-1991* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Demography Division)].

1.2 Data on educational attainment

Data on education remains the best tool currently available to francophones in minority situations to estimate literacy levels in their communities. The benchmark used is still the Unesco one: persons with less than nine years of schooling are considered to have difficulty reading and writing. However, recent surveys, including the IALS, have shown that educational attainment is not equivalent to literacy, since many adults have reading skills different from what their level of schooling implies (see section 1.4). The data in Table 4 allows one to compare the results by province for francophones and anglophones using the 1981 and 1991censuses.

---

11. Marc Godbout (1995), *Plan directeur de la main-d'œuvre de la francophonie canadienne*, p. 48.

12. Charles Castonguay (1983), *L'évolution de l'exogamie et des incidences sur les transferts linguistiques chez les populations provinciales de langue française au Canada entre 1971 et 1981* (Quebec City: Conseil de la langue française); Réjean Lachapelle and Jacques Henripin (1980), *The Demolinguistic Situation in Canada* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy).

Table 4
Francophone population aged 15 and over with less than 9 years of schooling, Canada, provinces and territories, comparison with anglophone population, 1981-1991

	Less than 9 years of schooling					
	1981			1991		
	Franc.	Angl.	Gap	Franc.	Angl.	Gap
Prince Edward Island	49.9	24.6	25.3	32.5	14.6	17.9
Nova Scotia	36.8	21.2	15.6	24.4	12.5	11.9
Newfoundland	27.0	33.3	–4.7	20.5	20.5	0.0
New Brunswick	42.5	24.8	17.7	29.3	14.4	14.9
Quebec	29.8	18.6	11.2	20.3	11.8	8.5
Ontario	28.5	14.1	14.4	17.5	7.4	10.1
Manitoba	29.1	14.6	14.5	18.8	8.5	10.3
Saskatchewan	31.4	16.6	14.8	21.8	10.5	11.3
Alberta	21.6	10.0	11.6	11.9	5.4	6.5
British Columbia	22.4	10.2	12.2	13.6	5.7	7.9
Yukon	15.6	9.6	6.0	6.3	5.5	0.8
N.W.T.	19.2	14.5	4.7	10.5	9.6	0.9
Canada outside Quebec	**(data not available)**			**20.2**	**8.1**	**12.1**
Canada	**30.1**	**14.7**	**16.4**	**20.2**	**8.3**	**11.9**

Sources: The 1981 data is from Andrée Boucher's report (1989), *En toutes lettres et en français. L'analphabétisme et l'alphabétisation chez les francophones au Canada*, p. 31. The 1991 census data was obtained from Statistics Canada at the request of the NLS. 'Francophones' includes persons declaring French as sole or multiple response to the question on mother tongue. 'Anglophones' include persons declaring English as sole or multiple response to the same question.

Over ten years, a positive change in the situation of francophones can be noted: the proportion of those not completing nine years of school has dropped from 30% to 20%; however it is still twice as high as for anglophones (8%), even in Quebec. Although the percentage gap between francophones and anglophones with limited education has diminished everywhere (except in Newfoundland), it is still substantial, and exceeds ten points in six provinces. Prince Edward Island (33%) and New Brunswick (29%) have the highest proportions of francophones with limited education, as was the case in 1981. The lowest proportions are in the territories, Alberta and British Columbia; the gap with anglophones is also smallest in these regions. In general, the core regions (see p. 3) have a high rate of under-education, whereas the regions where francophones are a small minority post a higher level of educational attainment. However, those francophones are under much greater pressure to assimilate.

The improvement in the education of francophones can be explained chiefly by the remarkable progress of younger generation. The percentage of those 25 to 34 years of age with less than nine years

of school fell from 31.3% to 4.4% in 20 years (1971–1991); during the same period, the number of university graduates among these young people more than doubled.[13] All the same, questions remain as to the consequences of this progress for the future of the Canadian francophone community. First, we should investigate the extent to which these young people have done their studies in a francophone educational milieu, because this factor has impacts on their literacy skills in their mother tongue. It must also be remembered that over a fifth of young people under 25 choose English as the language they use, particularly in regions of low concentration and where there are more mixed marriages. Will young people – and the children they will have – remain French-speaking, even though they are more educated?

To gather information on literacy, data on educational attainment must be interpreted in light of the special situation of francophones and the status of French in each province.[14] Many adult francophones received their schooling in English or in bilingual schools, where the learning of French was assigned less time and confined to certain subjects. This situation has had and still has a harmful influence on the drop-out rate, the persistence of illiteracy, and the increase in assimilation of Francophones.[15]

Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, passed in 1982, grants parents in official-language minority communities the right to have their children educated in their language and the right to manage the educational institutions offering that instruction, on the condition in both cases that this is warranted by the number of children. A judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada points out the importance of this section for linguistic minorities "because of the vital role of education in preserving and encouraging linguistic and cultural vitality."[16] For francophone parents, widely dispersed through an otherwise entirely anglophone community, school often represents the only public place where the minority language can be inculcated in their children. But instruction in French does not seem by itself to ensure proficiency in the language. Support in the home and a cultural milieu more favourable to French could well prove other elements essential to such proficiency.[17]

---

13. These figures are slightly below the results for anglophones of the same age, however. In fact, 2.4% of anglophones had not finished nine years of schooling in 1991 (versus 4.4% of francophones) and 15.5% had a university degree (compared with 14.3% of francophone youth).

14. New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province; the others are unilingual English, even though certain public services are available in French (particularly in Ontario and Manitoba), except Quebec, where French has been the only official language since 1977.

15. Studies show that education in English or in a bilingual environment is systematically disadvantageous to young French-speakers outside Quebec. On the other hand, young francophones who attend unilingual French schools not only speak English as well as those studying in English or bilingual schools, but they have a better self-image and higher academic aspirations (Churchill, Frenette and Quazi, 1985).

16. Mahé, p. 350, quoted by Jean-Charles Ducharme (1996), *New Canadian Perspectives. Status report: Minority-language educational rights* (Ottawa: Department of Canadian Heritage), p. 4.

17. Raymond Mougeon (1989), "Scolarisation en français sans maintien de cette langue au foyer: impact sur la compétence en français parlé," paper presented at the symposium "Regard sur le jeune Franco-Ontarien," University of Ottawa.

Even today, with the exception of New Brunswick[18] and to some extent Ontario,[19] the minority's right to education in French is still relatively fragile. Even though it has been technically the law for nearly 15 years, francophone school governance was granted in Ontario only in 1997, in 1996 in Saskatchewan and British Columbia, in 1994 in Alberta, in 1993 in Manitoba, and in 1991 in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.[20] Furthermore, the manner of implementing educational services and school governance for francophones is still a subject of legal dispute in six provinces and one of the territories.[21] Finally, the Commission nationale des parents francophones is concerned about the precarious existence of French schools and the difficulty of maintaining a level of quality comparable to that found in anglophone schools.[22]

1.3 Evolution of the concept of measurement of literacy skills

For about the last ten years, surveys to measure literacy skills have been moving away from educational attainment to directly assessing literacy skills in the official language(s) of the countries concerned.[23] More emphasis has been placed on the ability to deal with real documents than on reading academic texts. This way of measuring literacy skills sets aside the divisive approach which separates people into 'illiterate' and 'literate', in favour of a more gradated description of reading skills over a broad continuum.

Describing reading behaviours and practices is an approach that is closer to reality. Society consists of a multitude of readers who differ in age, gender, language and social status, education, and so forth. Some adults can understand very complex texts because they have acquired the historical and philosophical knowledge to do so. Many people read newspapers regularly but never books. Others

---

18. The full range of educational services in French — from kindergarten to university — has been available in New Brunswick for over 15 years.

19. Until just recently, governance of Franco-Ontarian schools had been divided among four francophone school boards (which used to govern a quarter of the French schools) and some mixed boards. In January 1997, the provincial government granted total governance of the schools to francophones and announced the creation of seven new school boards.

20. Newfoundland, Yukon and the Northwest Territories have not granted francophones the governance of schools; see Jean-Charles Ducharme (1996), *New Canadian Perspectives. Status report: Minority-language educational rights.*

21. For example, although there is a great deal of satisfaction with school administration in Ontario, there is some question about what financial resources will be available to these new structures, in view of the huge budget cuts imposed on the entire government apparatus; see Linda Cardinal (1997), "Les Franco-ontariens contrôleront-ils vraiment leurs écoles?", *Le Devoir*, January 30, p. A–7.

22. In its annual report for 1993, the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario noted that: on average, the quality of education in French in Ontario is not equivalent to what is offered in English-language schools; there is a shortage of teaching resources in French; and there are not enough francophone teachers in some areas (Ducharme, 1996). See also Caroline Montpetit (1996), "Les écoles francophones hors Québec sont sous-financées," *Le Devoir,* November 11, p. A–2.

23. It is useful to remember that this data is not an exact reflection of literacy levels, since it does not report on the literacy status of immigrants, Aboriginal people or even some official minorities in their native languages. There is an essential sociocultural dimension to the understanding of literacy that should not be overlooked.

consult only plans, letters and order forms as part of their job. Many adults are regular novel readers but are not interested in essays or information texts. Some will read only if they are forced to. Others attempt to conceal their difficulties, seeking out the information they need from those around them to get by. What differentiates a good reader from a person with so-called 'low literacy skills'?

'Literacy' as a concept is broader than literacy training, which refers to a socio-educational activity, a more or less structured process of learning language codes. Literacy describes a vast continuum of skills connected to written or printed matter used at work, at home or in social activities. In the most recent adult literacy survey (IALS, 1994), literacy is defined as a mode of adult behaviour, namely "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."[24] This definition embraces the following concepts:

- Literacy designates a cognitive information-processing skill which presupposes abilities to analyze, organize, compare and interpret elements of a text, particularly on the basis of one's previous knowledge.
- This assumes the ability to use real documents of various kinds which are encountered in everyday life.
- Literacy is not a goal, but a means of achieving broader aims of social integration and personal development.

Reading is often considered the integrating element of literacy; because the activity of reading is generally more frequent in daily life than writing. It is normally reading or textual interpretation that forms the basis for solving mathematical problems or writing a message. Hence it is not a matter of evaluating an adult's ability to decipher sounds, letters or words, or isolated success at mathematical operations. These micro-skills are useful to the extent that they are part of an actual context of communication. This new method of defining and measuring reading skills has some very positive aspects. It makes it possible, first, to consider reading practices as social, contextual and developmental behaviour, and second, not to label people 'illiterate' as if they were total strangers to written or printed material.

However, literacy cannot be limited to this definition. It must be embodied in a cultural dimension. Reading and writing are affected by the social and cultural contexts in which they take place. Language not only assumes certain practical functions, but profoundly marks the identity of individuals and connects them in many ways to their community of origin.[25] Thus literacy is not a description of sterilized or technical practices, whatever the language concerned. On the contrary: the literacy of a community, in this case the French-speaking community, characterizes its modes of expression, its culture, and its vitality or difficulties. In short, to quote Serge Wagner, "*[translation]* literacy defines not only the processing of information, but a cultural practice of communication."

---

24. Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995), *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada and Paris: OECD), p. 14.

25. Serge Wagner (1996a), *Alphabétisme et alphabétisation en français au Canada. Étude préliminaire dans le contexte de l'Enquête internationale sur l'alphabétisation des adultes (EIAA)*, discussion paper on behalf of the FCAF for Statistics Canada (Hull: FCAF), pp. 3-4.

1.4 Francophones and surveys measuring literacy skills in Canada

Three studies have been conducted in Canada in the last ten years to assess adult literacy skills: one by Southam News in 1987; the Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA, 1989); and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1994). The NLS provided support to the two more recent surveys, in collaboration with Statistics Canada. We will review some of the Southam News and LSUDA results, and then dwell at greater length on the figures revealed by the IALS.

The Southam News newspaper chain surveyed 2,500 adults in Canada.[26] This survey, whose methodology was modelled on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the United States, was the first of its kind in Canada to directly measure reading skills using tests in French and English. A jury of some 20 experts, assembled for the purpose, set a threshold to differentiate people with limited literacy skills from those deemed to have good literacy skills. The results showed that 23% of Canadian adults are considered to have poor literacy skills: 29% of francophones and 23% of anglophones; the proportion of adults in Quebec with poor skills is 28%.[27] Half of these people had finished at least nine years of school, a fact which invalidates the use of level of education as the sole criterion for measuring literacy. With the exception of a report on Quebec commissioned by the Ministry of Education,[28] there is little in this survey that describes and analyzes the skills of Canadian francophones outside of Quebec. Furthermore, almost all the testing outside Quebec was done in English.

In 1989, Statistics Canada conducted a far-reaching survey on the reading and writing skills of about 9,500 adults between the ages of 16 and 69.[29] Reading and numeracy abilities were measured, in French or in English, against certain graduated levels of skills. In addition to data on Quebec, an oversampling financed by the Government of New Brunswick provided data for francophones in that province.[30] The LSUDA findings show that 16% of Canadian adults rank at the lowest levels for reading (1 and 2), and 14% at level 1 for numeracy; in Quebec, the results for these levels are 19%each. LSUDA confirms certain of the Southam News data in reporting that francophones lag behind in terms of literacy: 17% of them are at the lowest levels (1 and 2), versus 9% of

---

26. Creative Research Group (1987a), *Literacy in Canada: a research report* (Ottawa: Southam News).

27. The survey of the situation in Quebec is limited, however, because of the small size of the sample.

28. Creative Research Group (1987b), *L'analphabétisme au Québec. Rapport d'enquête.* (Ottawa: Southam News, for the Government of Quebec, ministère de l'Éducation).

29. Statistics Canada (1991), *Adult Literacy in Canada: results of a national study* (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, Science and Technology).

30. These data, discussed by Stan Jones, were not published.

anglophones.[31] In New Brunswick, 27% of the adults responding to the test in French were at levels 1 and 2 in reading, compared with 15% of those responding in English.[32]

These differences may be attributable in part to the academic lag of francophones mentioned earlier (see section 1.2). However the LSUDA findings show that even when educational attainment is taken into account, the results for francophones are still worse than for anglophones: 61% of francophones with less than eight years of school are ranked at levels 1 and 2 for reading, versus 51% of anglophones reporting the same level of education. There are also differences in terms of age: 73% of francophones aged 25 to 34 have a satisfactory reading level (level 4) versus 83% of anglophones the same age. However, the same proportions of young people in both groups have completed the various stages of academic progress (see p. 8). This confirms that education is not a complete explanation for literacy results. Other aspects deserve to be explored, particularly the frequency and variety of reading practices, written and print material available, language transfer, language of education, and so on.

January 1995 saw the publication of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which describes and compares the literacy skills of adults in seven countries based on their activities in everyday life or in the workplace and on a series of sociodemographic variables.[33] Statistics Canada, in collaboration with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the U.S., coordinated the formulation and administration of this survey with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Unesco and Eurostat. This survey is the first international attempt to draw valid comparisons of reading skills in six different languages, and there will be follow-ups to it.[34] The Canadian sample covers more than 5,500 adults aged 16 and over; to obtain more detailed data, it was decided to do an oversampling of young people between 16 and 24 years of age, social assistance recipients, unemployed persons, and persons aged 69 and over. In addition, there will be data on Franco-Ontarians and francophones in New Brunswick thanks to a substantial financial contribution from the two provincial governments and the NLS.

In the IALS, literacy skills are measured according to three categories of real-life materials: prose (newspaper or magazine articles, novels, brochures...), document (tables, lists, diagrams...) and quantitative (a variety of texts containing arithmetical operations). Reading was measured on three separate scales, each divided into five skill levels, with level 1 being the lowest and levels 4 and 5 (together) the highest. Although based on a similar method, the IALS and the LSUDA are different

---

31. This lag has also been verified in Quebec: 58% of francophones have adequate reading skills (level 4) compared with 68% of Anglophones; see Sylvie Roy, in collaboration with Isabelle Gobeil (1993), *Les capacités de lecture des Québécoises et des Québécois. Résultats d'une enquête canadienne*, corrected edition (Quebec City: ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de la formation générale des adultes).

32. Data cited in Serge Wagner (1996a), *Alphabétisme et alphabétisation en français au Canada. Étude préliminaire dans le contexte de l'Enquête internationale sur l'alphabétisation des adultes (EIAA).*

33. Statistics Canada and OECD (1995), *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey* (Statistics Canada and Paris: OECD); Stan Jones *et al.* (1996), *Reading the future: a portrait of literacy in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, National Literacy Secretariat).

34. The IALS is presently in a second phase of data collection, in collaboration with other participating countries.

in several respects, which are presented in Table 5. It should be kept in mind here that level 1 of the IALS corresponds to levels 1 and 2 of the LSUDA: these levels designate people with the weakest literacy skills in French or in English.

Table 5
Some differences between the IALS (1994) and LSUDA (1989)

	LSUDA	IALS
Definition	Literacy: "The information processing skills necessary to use the printed material commonly encountered at work, at home, and in the community."	Literacy: "mode of adult behaviour, namely: using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."
Participating countries	Canada	Canada, U.S.A., Poland, Sweden, French- and German-speaking Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands
Language of test	English and French	English, French, Swedish, German, Polish and Dutch
Age span of people sampled	16 to 69	16 and over
Size of sample	9,455	5,660
Data available on francophones	Quebec and New Brunswick francophones	Quebec, New Brunswick francophones and Franco-Ontarians
Correspondence of literacy levels	4 levels 0 ..... ** 1 ..... 1 2 ..... 1 3 ..... 2 4 ..... 3 ..... 4 5	5 levels
Skills measured	Reading Numeracy	→Prose scale →Document scale →Quantitative scale

** Level 0 of the LSUDA comprised all those who were unable to take the test because they were not familiar with English or French. In the IALS, an attempt was made to better classify these persons within the levels, taking into account their past schooling and other characteristics.

As can be seen in Table 6, over one quarter of adult Canadians have very limited literacy skills on the three scales. The distribution of these skills is similar to what was observed in the United States, although a higher proportion of the U.S. population ranks at level 1. In both countries there is a polarization of skills: level 1 and level 4/5 each comprise a large share of the population.

Table 6
Distribution of literacy skills on the three scales, Canada, adults 16 years of age and over (IALS, 1994)

	Level			
Scale	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4/5**
Prose	22	26	33	20
Document	23	24	30	22
Quantitative	22	26	32	20

When the results of the IALS are compared with those of the LSUDA, taking into account age and the correspondence of the levels (Table 7), one notes a stabilization in the literacy of Canadian adults: the figures are roughly comparable between the two surveys, a little lower in the IALS. However, over a five year span, one might have expected an improvement, since older people, who are generally less educated, have given way to young people who are graduating or still in school. But that is not the case; it will be necessary to continue and refine our research in order to find some answers on this subject.

Table 7
Comparison of the distribution of literacy on the three IALS scales with that on the single LSUDA reading scale, Canadian adults aged 16 to 69

	IALS levels			
Scale	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4/5**
	%			
Prose	18	26	35	22
Document	19	25	32	24
Quantitative	18	26	34	22

	LSUDA levels			
Scale	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
	%			
Literacy	7	9	22	62

The IALS confirms and also defines the close relationship between education and literacy (Table 8). About nine adults in ten with less than eight years of schooling rank at the lowest level on the three scales; among adults with an elementary school diploma, this percentage drops considerably. On the other hand, half or more of the university graduates rank at level 4/5 on the three scales; the data also show a qualitative demarcation between the literacy skills of college graduates and university graduates. For example, 56% of Canadian university graduates have level 4/5 literacy on the prose scale, compared with 25% of college graduates.

Table 8
Distribution of literacy on each of the three scales by highest level of educational attainment, Canadian adults aged 16 and over (IALS, 1994)

	Level			
Highest level of education	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4\5**
	Prose scale			
Less than Grade 8	89	9	...	...
Completed elementary school	59	29	12	...
Some secondary school	25	36	32	7
Secondary school graduate	12	31	40	18
Community college graduate	7	23	45	25
University graduate	...	11	33	56
	Document scale			
Less than Grade 8	92	6	...	...
Completed elementary school	65	21	13	...
Some secondary school	27	39	25	9
Secondary school graduate	13	29	36	22
Community college graduate	7	18	39	36
University graduate	...	11	40	46
	Quantitative scale			
Less than Grade 8	91	8	...	...
Completed elementary school	61	25	14	...
Some secondary school	26	41	26	7
Secondary school graduate	11	33	41	16
Community college graduate	7	22	46	25
University graduate	...	5	33	60

... = Sample size too small to produce reliable estimates.

The authors of the report indicate that, on the whole, there is a close correspondence between literacy and education for two thirds of Canadian adults. However, this trend is not confirmed for the remaining third: half of them have skills above their level of schooling, and the other half skills that are below. Therefore factors other than education contribute to the maintenance or deterioration of literacy, one of the most important being, according to the IALS, frequency and variety of reading activities. Apart from education, reading and applying the skills learned are what enable one to remain a good reader or become a better one. It is thus possible for a person with limited schooling to improve his or her literacy through varied and assiduous practice. For francophones in minority situations, it remains to be seen to what extent such practice in French is possible and socially significant.

The IALS also shows that there is a connection between literacy and age. Literacy skills are higher among younger people, who are also more educated, whereas people 65 and over have the lowest skill levels. Nonetheless, about 10% of young people between the ages of 16 and 25 rank at level 1on the three scales. Generally, it is adults aged 36 to 45 who have the best literacy skills, possibly because of their life experience and their familiarity with the labour market and various types of texts. Minor gender differences are also noted: women post better results on the prose scale, whereas men's results are very slightly higher on the other two scales. Furthermore, the IALS confirms other LSUDA data, namely that the great majority of adults are satisfied with their literacy skills and consider them adequate for work or personal needs.

There are many social, family and cultural factors associated with literacy. In brief, the survey data shows us that the more educated people are, the higher their literacy levels, and the more opportunities they have to work, earn a better income, apply their abilities at work or in daily life, and assimilate training. Those who are less educated, on the other hand, are generally the ones who have the weakest literacy skills, are least regularly employed and at the lowest wages, have the fewest occasions to read, and take the fewest courses to upgrade their knowledge.

The Canadian report devotes five pages to analysis of literacy according to mother tongue.[35] Table 9 presents the distribution of literacy according to language chosen for the test. The literacy skills of the adults who responded in French seem inferior to those of the adults who responded in English: at level 1 for prose, we find 19% of those who responded in English versus 28% of those who responded in French. With the exception of the quantitative scale, adults responding in French and living outside Quebec appear to have weaker skills than Quebec adults.

The report's authors point out that these differences level out, however, if level of educational attainment is taken into account. We saw earlier that young francophones outside Quebec have a level of schooling comparable to anglophones of the same age. Will this improvement increase their skills in French, when we know that education is only a partial explanation for literacy?

---

35. A preliminary study of the file indicates, however, that the data on francophones must be interpreted with caution, particularly because of the small size of the Quebec sample, which could have an impact on the accuracy and reliability of the general data on francophones.

Table 9
Distribution of literacy on the three scales by language of test, Canadian adults aged 16 and over (IALS, 1994)

Language of test	Level 1	2	3	4/5
		Prose scale		
English	19	26	31	24
French	28	26	38	9
Quebec	27	25	39	9
Outside Quebec	33	30	25	...
		Document scale		
English	21	24	31	25
French	31	27	28	14
Quebec	31	27	29	14
Outside Quebec	33	27	25	...
		Quantitative scale		
English	20	24	33	23
French	28	32	30	10
Quebec	28	32	30	10
Outside Quebec	28	32	29	...

... = Sample size too small to produce reliable estimates.

As mentioned in the report, the sample responding in French constitutes only part of the francophone group:[36] to this we must add those who responded to the test in English. Table 10 indicates the choice of test language by region. Virtually all francophones in Quebec and 89% of those in New Brunswick chose French, but this was the case for only 53% of adult Franco-Ontarians. There is a clear trend for francophones in the other provinces to prefer English. Selection of French as the test language decreases in step with the reduction of the demographic weight of francophones. On the whole, it is more pronounced among francophones who also indicate French as the language used at home or work.

These figures are consistent with the data presented earlier, including that on language transfer (see section 1.1). More generally, they reflect the difficulty of using or retaining one's skills in French when there is a lack of linguistic concentration and little or no access to an education system in the

36. According to the definition of the federal government, Statistics Canada and all of the francophone associations, a 'francophone' means someone whose first language spoken was French, and who still understands it.

mother tongue. They also indicate the importance, in Canadian literacy measurement surveys, of accounting for francophones who respond in English if we are to obtain an overall portrait of francophones in minority communities and evaluate language transfer phenomena. An inventory of the many reasons that prompt minority francophones to select English in a survey of this kind still needs to be done.

Table 10
Choice of language for testing
by respondents whose first language is French,
Canadian adults aged 16 and over, by region (IALS, 1994)

	Language chosen for test	
Region	**French**	**English**
Atlantic Canada (other than New Brunswick)	...	99
New Brunswick	89	11
Quebec	99	...
Ontario	53	47
Western Canada	...	96

... = Sample size too small to produce reliable estimates.

Table 11 presents adult literacy by mother tongue and language chosen for the test. While 13% of anglophones (99% of whom responded to the test in English) rank at level 1 for prose, this proportion doubles for francophones responding in French, and triples for those who choose English. The differences between the two groups of francophones are greater on the document scale and slightly less on the quantitative scale. Comparing the three sub-groups, one notes that the weakest skills are to be found in francophones responding to the test in English. Their results are comparable with those of immigrants.[37]

37. According to Jones *et al.* (1996, p. 36), 36% of immigrants rank at level 1 on the prose and document scales and 34% on the quantitative scale. However, this does not deny that a good many immigrants may read another language, something which was not measured.

Table 11
Distribution of literacy on the prose scale, by respondents' mother tongue and language chosen for test, Canadian adults aged 16 and over (IALS, 1994)

Mother tongue	Language of test		Level 1	2	3	4/5
				Prose scale		
English	English	(99%)	13	25	35	27
French	French	(72%)	25	27	39	9
	English	(28%)	35	23	33	10
				Document scale		
English	English	(99%)	15	23	35	28
French	French	(72%)	28	28	29	15
	English	(28%)	41	22	30	7
				Quantitative scale		
English	English	(99%)	14	23	37	26
French	French	(72%)	25	32	32	11
	English	(28%)	29	34	28	10

What should we make of these results? Is the language chosen for the test the one most familiar to the adults? Can we assume skills in French for the francophones who responded in English? Qualitative studies must be done on this subject, but other research suggests that literacy skills in French are as weak as, if not weaker than, skills measured in English. Success in learning a second language presupposes a sound mastery of the mother tongue at the start: the more solid the structure of the first language, the better equipped one is to acquire the second.[38]

These results indicate considerable difficulties, for many francophones in minority communities, not in reading French, but in reading *per se*. In the Canadian report, the hypothesis is offered that "the maintenance of strong mother tongue literacy skills appears to depend on high concentrations of people who can tackle language transfer issues, and requires a supportive infrastructure and a receptive cultural milieu".[39] In the final section of this first part, we shall see how the French literacy training movement has evolved to resolve these problems.

---

38. Stacy Churchill, Normand Frenette and Saeed Quazi (1985), *Éducation et besoins des Franco-Ontariens. Le diagnostic d'un système d'éducation*, vol. 1 (Toronto).

39. Stan Jones *et al.* (1996), *Reading the Future: a portrait of literacy in Canada*, p. 35.

1.5 Some historical elements of the French literacy training movement

In the mid-1960s, the federal government involved itself in adult education on a massive scale throughout Canada, in the context of labour force training. The aim was to combat high unemployment by raising the educational and occupational qualifications of workers. Many of the unemployed who registered for these programs had limited education. To meet their needs, basic training was offered in co-operation with the provinces. This was not yet recognized as literacy training and was generally reserved for people in the labour force. In the early eighties, the federal government left it to the provinces to finance and organize academic upgrading, so it could concentrate instead on more targeted occupational training objectives for specific groups of workers.

At that time, literacy training was not deemed to be an issue of public interest in Canada; it would become so by the mid-1980s, as in many industrialized countries were forced to officially acknowledge for the first time the persistence of low literacy skills in spite of compulsory education. A number of national anglophone associations such as Laubach Literacy, Frontier College and the new Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) publicly affirmed the importance of literacy training. After the findings of the 1987 Southam News survey were released and widely published in the media, the council of provincial ministers of education (CMEC) published an opinion on literacy training in 1988.[40] In that context of raising awareness about illiteracy, the federal government created the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) in 1987 to promote and support literacy training initiatives across the country.

From that time until the mid-eighties, there were few literacy training opportunities available to francophone adults in minority communities, except for a few initiatives in Ontario and New Brunswick. Most national francophone associations remained focused on children's education rights, and devoted little energy to securing educational services for adults. The absence of an infrastructure for French-language adult education at the provincial level (except in Quebec) did not make such activity any easier. Nevertheless, we should note a mini-seminar in 1983 on francophone literacy skills, organized by the Fédération des francophones hors Québec (FFHQ) in collaboration with the Institut canadien de l'éducation des adultes (ICEA), to which literacy practitioners from Quebec were invited.[41] Here the extent of illiteracy was acknowledged, but it was to be several years before action was taken on proposals for follow-up approved at the seminar. Associations such as MCL and Frontier College also made efforts to provide services to francophones, with mixed success.

---

40. Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (1988), *Adult Illiteracy in Canada* (Toronto).

41. Fédération des francophones hors Québec (1983), *Analphabétisme chez les francophones hors Québec*, report of a mini-seminar on illiteracy and approaches to literacy training, held in Val-Morin on March 28, 29 and 30, 1983 (Ottawa: FFHQ).

Encouraged by these new prospects of support from the NLS, the FFHQ entered into an arrangement in 1988 with the ICEA and the Regroupement des groupes populaires d'alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ) to conduct a study on literacy and literacy training activities in French in all provinces and territories of Canada. In the summer of 1989, the Association canadienne d'éducation de langue française (ACELF) organized a special conference on literacy training for francophones with help from the federal government. The same year, the ICEA published the results of its study[42] and organized a seminar on francophone literacy, which was attended by participants from across Canada. Both the ACELF congress and the ICEA study and seminar underscored the urgency of the problem of low literacy skills among francophones in minority communities and the importance of literacy education as a cultural development tool. In 1991, on the initiative of the FFHQ and the ICEA, the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (FCAF) was founded. Its objective is to promote literacy training in French and to create links among French-language literacy training groups in Canada. The FCAF's structure is based on equal representation of four regions: Western Canada and the Territories, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada, and on statutory participation by learners at all decision-making levels.

At the same time as these national initiatives were taking place, literacy education activities in French were being organized in the provinces. We will briefly describe the situations in Ontario and New Brunswick, since this is where the first work was done, and where activities today remain the most structured at the provincial level. Since the mid-1980s, Ontario has seen the emergence of a Franco-Ontarian community movement dedicated to literacy training in French. Dialogues known as "Alpha-partage" were organized in 1985 between the first literacy training groups and a handful of school boards. A 1985 report by the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario (ACFO) spotlighted the magnitude of francophone literacy issues in Ontario within a broader social perspective.[43] In September 1986, the Ontario government issued its first literacy training policy that specifically recognized Francophone problems.

The primary vehicle for the development of literacy training in French was the Ontario Community Literacy (OCL) program, created in 1987. In Ontario, they also hired a French-language co-ordinator. Substantial work was done at that time to organize and implement local initiatives, giving rise in 1988 to the Regroupement des groupes francophones d'alphabétisation populaire de l'Ontario (RGFAPO), largely modelled on the platform of the Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec (RGPAQ), which had been founded seven years earlier. The growing number of local groups was accompanied by considerable production of learning materials, the establishment of the FORA centre, and Francophone representation at the Alpha-Ontario resource centre in Toronto.

At present, the Ontario government supports literacy training for four streams: anglophones, francophones, Native people and people with hearing disabilities. Services for these groups are offered

---

42. Andrée Boucher (1989), *En toutes lettres et en français. L'analphabétisme et l'alphabétisation chez les francophones au Canada.*

43. Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario (1985), *Les francophones tels qu'ils sont. Regard sur le monde du travail franco-ontarien* (Vanier: ACFO).

variously by community colleges and school boards, community groups, and unions.[44] There are some 30 francophone community groups across Ontario. About two thirds of them are members of the RGFAPO.

In New Brunswick, literacy training in French is facilitated by the status accorded to the French language in the province and by the size of its francophone population. In the early eighties, a report on literacy training in French that was submitted to the provincial government[45] recommended an independent program for serving francophone literacy needs, priority for research and the production of learning materials, and the participation of the community colleges in providing literacy training services. To support community literacy training, a provincial association was formed in 1988, with the assistance of the Société des Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick: the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB) comprises the majority of local literacy training councils, which are responsible for generating public awareness and promoting literacy training in French. These councils work in concert with the Community Academic Services Programs (CASP) established in 1990 by the provincial government to ensure that there would be training in French in local communities. The Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick also endeavours to work more closely with Literacy New Brunswick Inc., a non-profit organization mandated by the provincial government to develop literacy training in the province in both English and in French.

▲▼▲

The facts presented in this first part show that, while there seems to be a differential in literacy skills all across Canada, it is the francophones in minority-language communities who find themselves most disadvantaged. Their numbers have been relatively stable for 20 years, but the francophone minority populations are aging, they continue to be less educated than the English-speaking population, they generally have lower literacy skills, and many of their young people decide to live in English.

In these elements we can see the effects of "subtractive bilingualism"[46], which is seen among those whose first language is restricted to private life, while the second language prevails in all public sectors of activity, often including education. This situation reflects the need in Canada for wide access to a system of French-language education and the constant challenge of ensuring its quality. We also notes the importance of ensuring wider availability and circulation of written material in French if we want to maintain useful and socially meaningful literacy levels for francophones.

---

44. The Ontario Community Literacy (OCL) program is still the biggest investor in literacy training for francophones, although the funds granted to groups have diminished over the past two years (see "En Ontario, l'analphabétisme demeure inquiétant," *Le Droit* (1996) Ottawa, September 9).

45. Program Development and Evaluation Branch, (1983), *A Second Chance: Literacy in New Brunswick* (New Brunswick Department of Advanced Education and Training).

46. Serge Wagner, with Pierre Grenier (1990), *Analphabétisme de minorité et alphabétisation d'affirmation nationale. À propos de l'Ontario français*, vol. 1: Synthèse théorique et historique, Alpha communautaire chez les Franco-Ontariens collection (Ottawa: Mutual Press) [translation].

We have briefly outlined the development of literacy training in French in Canada. In Part Two, we describe some issues which might contribute to reinforcing action to advance literacy and literacy training for Francophones.

PART TWO

PART TWO

Issues for the development of French-language literacy training in Canada's minority communities

The French literacy movement is relatively well recognized in Canada today, in both francophone and anglophone communities, by institutional partners and by community associations. Among its key achievements is the fact that literacy training in French is now available almost everywhere across the country. The creation of the FCAF in 1991 lent impetus to initiatives in minority communities, espeially by offering a forum for national exchange and a common platform for representation.

However, the challenges facing francophones over literacy are many. The achievements of the movement are still fragile, and as we saw in Part One, the literacy problems of minority francophones continue to be serious. The present trend of budget cuts at every level of government is particularly hard on the most vulnerable groups in society, such as the unemployed, women, the elderly and linguistic minorities. Minority francophone communities are among the groups affected this way.

In this part of the report, we will focus on seven issues which could contribute now to the strengthening of literacy and literacy training for francophones in minority communities.

For each issue, we make some observations and pose some questions designed to call forth discussion. Some questions are general in nature and are intended to advance the debate. Others are more pointed; they explore and call for more immediate action. It is up to each partner to find its own answers and to take action on them. While these issues are discussed separately for greater clarity, they are all important, and interdependent. They are as follows:

- Ensuring the recognition and continuity of literacy training initiatives
- Consolidating and adapting literacy training models
- Improving literacy training practices
- In-service training for practitioners
- Linking literacy to other issues in francophone communities
- Enhancing research
- Sharing responsibilities for literacy issues

2.1 Ensuring the recognition and continuity of literacy training initiatives

This issue, like many others affecting the survival and consolidation of francophone minority communities of Canada, poses a major challenge. To ensure continuity, there must first be government **recognition of the unique nature of issues facing francophones**. And for this to happen, the situation must be analyzed in detail and suitable measures must be put in place, in co-operation with francophone associations. Only by recognizing the nature and seriousness of these issues will we be able to address the causes and adopt preventive measures. The fragility of the status of the French language, limited educational services in French, and the failure to recognize the distinctive nature of these issues partially explain the precarious existence of many francophone literacy groups. Since education is under provincial jurisdiction, the provinces have a clear role to play in protecting their francophone minorities. The federal government has a responsibility as well, because it has a duty to ensure the growth and development of the official-language minorities and to preserve the linguistic duality of Canada (see section 2.7).

What is our assessment of the recognition accorded to the unique nature of the problems of minority francophones by the various levels of government? Can this recognition be said to have advanced or diminished over the past five years? In what ways? How can we improve the situation in the years ahead?

Practices in francophone communities with respect to literacy training generally differ from those in anglophone communities in the approaches and organizational models they use, as well as the problems they encounter. This is yet another reason to emphasize and enhance their distinct nature. An across-the-board policy that takes no account of language and cultural differences is hardly one adapted to minority francophones. For example, it will not address the recruitment difficulties peculiar to francophones in minority communities, the effects of being schooled in English, or the significance of refrancization. Strategies developed by francophones are more likely to tackle the special problems of literacy in francophone communities. French literacy training activities that are **planned and implemented by francophone groups** are therefore something which must be retained. Before 1987, the practice was to support bilingual associations and programs, which in reality did not always recognize problems specific to the francophone communities that they professed in principle to represent.

What are the trends today? How can we ensure that francophones have control over their own literacy development?

Can today's bilingual associations or programs contribute to establishing approaches tailored to the needs of francophones? Under what conditions?

In Ontario, New Brunswick and to some degree Nova Scotia, provincial governments have set up literacy training programs or structures especially for francophones, and coordinated by francophones. Some of these services are part of a broader remedial program for adults, such as the Community Academic Services Program (CASP) in New Brunswick. In addition, many local French literacy training projects depend heavily on support from the NLS. Funds invested in literacy training are still effectively tied to project delivery, while the infrastructure of the organizations receives little or no support. This situation is detrimental to the long-range survival of services offered and to the task of setting down roots in the community. The strategy of funding individual projects results in the generation of more initiatives without the possibility of deriving full benefit from them. Yet literacy training practices presuppose ongoing work whose results are visible only over the long term.

How can we preserve and consolidate existing structures and programs directed at francophones?

In communities with small minorities, how can we ensure stable funding for the infrastructures that support literacy training initiatives?

In every province, development of literacy training depends on the strength of francophone numbers. In Quebec, francophones are the majority and form the nucleus of the population, and French is officially recognized as the language of public service, policy and employment; hence literacy training in French in Quebec is not comparable to that in Ontario, for example, where francophones make up 5% of the population and face problems of assimilation every day. For that matter, Franco-Ontarian realities themselves are not the same in the northeast and the south of the province. A general discussion about literacy in French-speaking communities in Canada may well mask individual situations and serve as an obstacle to determining the resources or challenges specific to a particular community. The national literacy training movement must be able to reflect these nuances in order to grasp the real challenges facing francophones in their day-to-day lives.

How can a national organization like the FCAF accurately reflect in its policy platform, priorities and discourse, the dimensions of literacy and literacy training in French as these exist in the various regions?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of our community (locally or provincially)? How could we as a community contribute to the national discourse on francophone literacy?

Without question, one of the strengths of the French-language literacy training movement as a whole is **the status it accords learners.** In regional, provincial and national structures alike, learners have a statutory right to participate in decisions affecting them and to contribute to the advancement of literacy training. Particular attention has been paid to the simplification of policy and briefing documents to make them more accessible. But it is not easy to integrate adults with limited education, who are not familiar with the way an organization runs or with ideological debate. A conscious effort must be made to listen to and create solidarity among people who do not share the same language, the same level of schooling, or sometimes even the same values or convictions.

We must also question the consequences of "using" learners as illustrations of individual success stories. This tends to give an idealistic image of literacy training as the only way out. It is only one way among many to achieve self-affirmation for people who are still first of all parents, workers, heads of single-parent families, and citizens. Even if they succeed in becoming literate, they will still face the problems of lack of work and educational services and the difficulties of living in French. Learner success is not a private matter, and that is even more true in a linguistic minority community. Instead, it is part of the logic of development, be it community, economic or cultural. There is an ongoing democratic challenge to ensure that learners have a genuine say in all matters affecting literacy training in French (including training approaches) and the protection of their rights on other fronts (see sections 2.3 and 2.6).

What defines a 'learner'? At what point does a person cease to be a learner and return to being a parent, a worker, a francophone citizen? Do learners really have power within our structures? How do we prevent them from falling into the trap of paternalism?

Another challenge to the continuity of services in French is the **recruitment** of adults deemed to have low literacy skills. They must be convinced of the benefits and the necessity of literacy education in

French, especially in areas where francophones are a small and scattered minority. Many adults have been educated in English. The attraction of bilingualism is strong, especially for people with limited education. There is substantial resistance to investing in French, because adults have the impression that learning French will demand a lot of time and effort, when they consider written English more essential to their lives. These adults often have a negative perception of their own knowledge of French, both oral and written.

Yet many studies demonstrate the benefits of education in the mother tongue in terms of enhancing skills, continuing education and increasing self-confidence. Proficiency in the first language is not detrimental to learning a second language — it makes it easier, especially in communities where the second language is predominant.[47] In small minority communities, it appears that having an educational centre identified with francophone culture, as in Prince Edward Island, makes recruitment easier, because it makes francophones more proud, by giving the culture a place where it belongs, a place where French, both written and spoken, is really alive. Other avenues should be explored for developing recruitment techniques that recognize the problems posed by the attraction of English and bilingualism. We shall return to this subject in the section on refrancization activities (see page 38).

How should recruitment methods and techniques be developed to deal with the arguments of less well educated francophones in favour of bilingualism and their reluctance to take literacy training in French?

To facilitate recruitment, should we be putting more emphasis on literacy and the promotion of reading or on problems related to low literacy skills?

2.2 Consolidating and adapting literacy training models

The models for francophone literacy training, although influenced by trends elsewhere, particularly in Quebec, English Canada and the United States, differ from one province or region to another. The influence these have is affected by the history of the francophone communities, their size, the structures they have established, government attitudes towards them, and so on. Here we shall describe three of these models: community literacy training, family literacy training and workplace literacy.

Community literacy training is a model favoured in a number of francophone literacy groups. However, it does not have the same significance or the same aspects in every community. In Ontario,

---

47. See Stacy Churchill, Normand Frenette and Saeed Quazi (1985), *Éducations et besoins des Franco-Ontariens. Le diagnostic d'un système d'éducation.*

for example, it designates both a way of organizing, i.e., democratic structures to protect and promote the rights of people with low literacy skills, and an approach to adult education that aims to incorporate the social and cultural factors influencing literacy (see section 2.3). Elsewhere, community literacy training refers to a flexible organization linking community volunteers with a small group of learners. The adult education approach may be academic or social, depending on the region or the preferences of volunteers. This mode of organization has its own strengths and weaknesses. In its reliance on volunteer work and the commitment of local communities, the formula is flexible and appropriate to community needs. But it is also more fragile, and hence less conducive to the enrichment of training from year to year.

How can the community model consolidate its democratic foundations with protecting the rights of people who have low literacy skills?

In smaller minority communities, how can the community model of literacy training help raise the public status of the French language, implement new techniques and bring in new approaches to adult education?

How can the stability and development of this model be ensured when it is essentially based on volunteer work?

Family literacy training is another model which has seen considerable growth in the last ten years, chiefly in the United States and English Canada. It targets the family as the nucleus for all education and literacy training activities. In the United States, family literacy training programs are generating enthusiasm from donors, politicians and many educators; they are perceived as a solution that will guarantee literacy education in disadvantaged communities. This model is also criticized because it is associated with a conservative movement which advocates the disengagement of the State in favour of greater family accountability for education.[48] But the involvement of young people with literacy training skills is also a consideration, and has inspired some literacy groups to think about using projects with this approach to deal with literacy problems.

---

48. See Sylvie Roy and Hélène Tremblay (1994), *Prévention de l'analphabétisme et alphabétisation familiale. Document 1: notes et réflexions à partir de trois conférences* (Longueuil: Commission scolaire Jacques-Cartier and Direction de la formation générale des adultes).

Francophone groups, especially those in small minority communities, have developed and adapted the family literacy training model to meet their own needs.[49] In this model, literacy training is defined as a concern of the entire community, including family and school, in an increased desire to live in French by emphasizing the adaptation of learning and all communication tools to the French language. There are many active family literacy services, in Alberta, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Yukon and Prince Edward Island, for example, and most have ties to officials in francophone schools or school boards. There are a variety of activities: Saturday schools, workshops for parents, joint parent-child literacy programs, reading incentives for children. These create a context of cultural support and promote a culture of learning.

Are the ideas and values conveyed by the U.S. family literacy models relevant to our goals in minority communities?

If they are, how should the concepts be applied in our own cultural context? How do we introduce a structured, coherent approach to improving literacy in our communities?

When the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force, the door was opened for education and literacy training of francophone adults. As the Charter itself points out, such activity may serve to repair the inequalities of the past. To make the new school boards more aware of their role for parents who have low literacy skills or little education, a tour of Alberta was set up in 1994, in collaboration with resource people from Quebec and Nova Scotia.[50] The family literacy training model is coming into more widespread use, although some fear that its unique family-centred quality may lose out to a more academic approach if school boards assume responsibility for it.

What role can family literacy training initiatives play in the new Francophone school board structures established in small minority communities?

Must collaboration with school boards constrain family literacy training to an academic approach?

---

49. The Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français has published a series of papers on this subject: most are translations of American and Canadian texts, with the exception of one report, which constitutes an initial attempt at a synthesis: Yvon Laberge (1994), *L'alphabétisation familiale en français. Une démarche à reconnaître, des liens à définir,* first version (n.p.: FCAF). In 1994 the FCAF also organized a symposium on family literacy, for the purpose of defining some models specific to Francophones.

50. See Sylvie Roy (1995), "Bilan d'une belle tournée," *Bulletin A à Z*, vol. 1, No. 2 (December).

Workplace literacy is anothermodel that is becoming increasingly popular both in Quebec and in English-Canadian communities. Employers seem to have an interest in these projects, especially if they see potential benefits through increased productivity. Many unions are also promoting basic training in the workplace. The IALS results show that skilled workers in Canada report reading less than those in other countries, and that employers can play a role in maintaining and even improving the skills of their work force. Data in an FCFA report indicates that francophones, particularly those in the core regions, generally hold jobs that pay less well and are of shorter duration than those of anglophones. This is largely attributable to the fact that these francophones are commonly less well educated and often hold seasonal, resource-based jobs in the fishing or mining industries.[51]

Even so, the workplace literacy model has not been widely explored in minority contexts, with the exception of a few projects in Ontario and New Brunswick.[52] But projects are feasible and even desirable, particularly in New Brunswick, where there is a high concentration of francophones and French is often the language of communication between workers and employers. The task of adapting the model to francophone realities still remains to be completed. In this regard, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada has helped set up a human resources adjustment committee with a mandate to study occupational training in francophone Acadian communities and work on developing strategies and policies for improving it. The committee also supports efforts to make French literacy programs accessible, and encourages employers to commit to staff training by offering them literacy training activities and other benefits.[53] It is a good forum for groups to develop workplace literacy programs and share expertise on francophone literacy (see section 2.7).

Finally, a good many francophones with low literacy skills may need services to help them rejoin the labour market, or escape from poverty or unreliable seasonal jobs. The IALS results show that, in general, people with the weakest literacy skills work fewer days than others and tend to be found more in declining industry sectors. Hence they rely more on government. The FCAF has inventoried a number of projects connected to small business development that are run by people with low literacy skills. These include a labour co-operative for young people and a restaurant serving soup and meals at affordable prices.[54] Such experiments in "social economics" (a developing concept that is becoming more popular in Quebec) can enrich a community while meeting specific social needs. They are interesting subjects for study, since they link literacy training to other social issues (see section 2.5).

---

51. Marc Godbout (1995), *Plan directeur de la main-d'œuvre de la francophonie canadienne*, p. 51.

52. For example, the program set up in 1990 by the Canadian Labour Congress and the New Brunswick Federation of Labour to offer courses during working hours free of charge to employees who want them.

53. Marc Godbout (1995), *Plan directeur de la main-d'œuvre de la francophonie canadienne*, pp. 117-118.

54. Barbara Losier (1995), *Alpha-Boulot*, project developed for the International Year of Tolerance (Hull: FCAF).

In what ways can French-language literacy training in the workplace be appropriate for our community? What do we know about the FCFA du Canada's principles of development with respect to the labour force in our region? Can we find any information in them that we could use for projects in the workplace?

To summarize, the three literacy training models we have described here (community literacy, family literacy and literacy in the workplace) have been modified to varying degrees to meet the specific needs and problems of francophones. The issue today continues to be not to adopt or reject a model from elsewhere wholesale, but rather to explore, adapt and enhance it in accordance with conditions in a particular community. Family or workplace literacy training programs are a priority in some areas, and not in others. It is therefore important to carry on open, informed discussion of their potential for francophone communities, taking into consideration the size of the francophone community and the cohesion, concerns and needs of groups.

How can we take advantage of the experiences and organizational models of literacy training that have been introduced in English Canada, the United States and Quebec? Which models are the most promising for our communities?

2.3 Improving literacy training practices

Literacy training practices in French are affected, as elsewhere, by various complementary or contradictory trends. They go hand in hand with social values, explanations of the causes of illiteracy, and theories about writing. We shall briefly define four adult education approaches that can be found in varying degrees in literacy training practices: the academic approach, the functional approach, the popular approach and the cultural approach.

Some people look at literacy training primarily from an **academic perspective**, as a process intended to make up for deficient or missing education. This approach centres on teaching the rules of written language, without necessarily having a basis in practical life situations or the needs of adult learners. Since low academic achievement is considered the main cause of literacy problems, the idea is to allow adults to resume their studies. The adult learner generally has little role in defining course content, which is a set curriculum. At best, academic training is focused on self-affirmation and self-esteem, and there is little concern about the social impact of the training.

The **functional approach** was developed as an alternative solution to the academic approach. In literacy training, the functional approach is manifested in a desire to show adults how to assume all of their social roles and to use written material in day-to-day life: to be able to read a newspaper, product instruction labels, or medicine bottles; to help their children at school; to vote; and so on. They are expected to learn social behaviour appropriate to the situation at the same time. Here we get away from strictly academic skills and notions of learning grammar and vocabulary, and move towards more practical life skills that are a part of everyday life. However, this approach is sometimes regarded as too focused on the rudiments of survival, too utilitarian. The IALS's definition of literacy (see p. 11) seems to partly reflect this view.

The **popular or "consciousness-raising" approach** tends to tie literacy training to social issues and the rights of adults with limited education who are the product of disadvantaged communities. This approach differs from both the academic and the functional approaches in the social and political issues it attributes to illiteracy, its rejection of a normative approach to language, and the priority it gives learners in defining their projects. Literacy education is seen as a way of "reading the world" and taking possession of it, as understood by the Brazilian educationalist Paolo Freire. Acquisition of reading and writing is not an end in itself, but must enable one to speak up, to be self-assertive in one's environment, to make known one's rights and wants.

The **cultural approach,** while largely inspired by the popular approach, takes greater account of the language of communication and the relations of cultural dominance and assimilation experienced by minority groups like francophones.[55] This approach is also relevant for immigrant and aboriginal populations in teaching a second language, where the instructors take people's mother tongue into consideration and highlight their culture of origin. Here language is central to adult education

---

55. Serge Wagner, in collaboration with Pierre Grenier (1990), *Analphabétisme de minorité et alphabétisation d'affirmation nationale. À propos de l'Ontario français.*

concerns, since it is defined as the key element in developing an identity, self-expression and culture. The cultural approach views minority-language speakers who have low literacy skills as being doubly excluded: on the one hand, they have historically had less access to schools, which were often the symbol of their assimilation; on the other, they have to live and communicate in an environment in which where their language and culture are not the daily norm and possibly not valued. For a minority-language group, therefore, the success of this approach to literacy training is based on affirmation of its mother tongue in the various spheres of life, broad reappropriation of its culture, and use of whatever means of communication it needs to survive and grow.

In practice, the approaches used in literacy training are often pluralistic, and even contradictory. But it is still true that the content, philosophy and objectives belonging to each of these approaches are divergent and point to different ways of designing and evaluating training. It is important for us to develop a better understanding and definition of literacy training practices in minority French-language communities, and their various strengths. Otherwise how do we support and guide the volunteers who want to get involved in educating learners? This is an essential training issue for teams in the field to explore (see section 2.4).

Are the approaches to literacy training described below all equally attractive? What are their various strengths and weaknesses?

How can we best define our current practices in the field of literacy training?

Are there certain essential elements that ought to guide our work in minority communities? What are they?

The IALS has highlighted the concept of **literacy** and shown that skills are reinforced by a variety of regular reading practice in daily life and at work. This definition is fully meaningful only as far as it also encompasses a cultural dimension (see p. 11). The concept is still not very well understood in literacy training circles. It can be explored with advantage, because it calls for a questioning of traditional educational approaches and encourages a greater focus on behaviour, attitudes and practices related to reading and writing. Similarly, an approach that takes literacy into account can facilitate the recruitment of francophones, particularly by showing them the importance of regular, diversified practice in both oral and written language skills to preserve their mother tongue. This is a possible training theme for instructors (see section 2.4).

What means can be put in place across the francophone community in Canada, at both the local and national levels, to promote and improve the literacy skills of francophones generally, not just to promote literacy training in French?

How can this new concept be used to advantage to enrich literacy training practices, recruitment techniques, and research and training projects?

Beyond that, language transfer, as revealed in the IALS for example, highlights the reality of **'refrancization'**, or language recovery.[56] Even though there is no official budget allocated to such activities, the process of linguistic and cultural reappropriation seems to be an intrinsic aspect of literacy training in French in minority communities, an aspect whose importance increases as the size of the francophone communities diminishes.[57] The issue of refrancization is a delicate one: it raises the thorny problem of assimilation and the boundaries that differentiate francophones from those who are no longer francophones. Refrancization is a subject which extends beyond the French literacy training community to affect all francophones.

Is 'refrancization' a primary responsibility of literacy training organizations? What other organizations could be taking on or sharing this responsibility?

The refrancization activities offered in literacy training generally target francophones with limited education. These people often feel dispossessed of their identity because they are straddling two cultures and two languages when they are often not proficient in either, orally or in writing. They are the people most vulnerable to "subtractive bilingualism". They are more inclined to disparage their skills in their mother tongue and they have fewer occasions to deal with written or print material. On the other hand, the higher one rises on the social ladder and the more education one has, the easier it is to preserve one's language and avoid certain choices disadvantageous to one's culture, even in a minority environment. Generally speaking, refrancization activities are considered a preliminary stage to a literacy training initiative, designed to enrich one's vocabulary, re-establish contact with one's

56. Remember that 47% of Franco-Ontarians and 11% of francophones in New Brunswick responded in English to the IALS test; the minority francophones from elsewhere who were questioned tended to choose English almost exclusively as their language for the test.

57. The FCAF has not adopted a position on this matter, apart from leaving the initiative to its member organizations. However, the results of the Fédération's evaluation indicate a need to take a clearer stand on issues of such importance (see Losier, 1995).

history and past, or simply regain confidence in the capacity for self-expression in one's own language.

Should refrancization be considered a normal and necessary stage of literacy training in French in minority communities?

Can refrancization activities be used to overcome recruitment difficulties?

Should we be developing adult education tools suitable for refrancization with the objective of cultural reappropriation in mind?

Finally, it is important to consult learners about what literacy training approaches will be used with them. This is part of the democratic process of involving the learners. It is both an asset and a challenge for the French literacy training movement (see section 2.1). Whether we like it or not, concepts of education and literacy training influence the practices of instructors, and ultimately the adults enrolled in literacy training programs. This influence is that much greater where adults with limited education have few regular readers as role models in their environment, and still see the learning and teaching of reading as a purely academic field. It is therefore important to make adult education methods as transparent and consistent as possible, especially if we want to elevate literacy training to something beyond mere instruction in the rules of language.[58]

2.4 Continuing the training of instructors

At present, there is still little structured, regular training offered to instructors in the French literacy movement. Others have made the same observation: a report published in Ontario for the Ministry of Education underscores weaknesses in training and the importance of defining and organizing it better.[59] Most instructors have learned on the job, drawing from their own experiences and on-going contact with learners. This situation reflects the precarious employment status of many instructors, many of whom are part-timers or even volunteers, and the value attributed to this type of work in terms of the availability of academic resources.

Short training programs are offered as needed by provincial associations (such as the Regroupement des groupes francophones d'alphabétisation populaire de l'Ontario or the Fédération d'alphabétisation

---

58. See Sylvie Roy (1996), *Enseignement et apprentissage de la lecture en alphabétisation. Module d'autoperfectionnement à l'intention du personnel enseignant* (Montreal: Table de concertation en alphabétisation de Montréal).

59. Pierre Leblanc (1992), *Recherche sur la formation et l'accréditation des alphabétiseurs en Ontario français* (n.p.: Literacy Branch, Ministry of Education, Government of Ontario).

du Nouveau-Brunswick) or by the FCAF. The Association canadienne d'enseignement de langue française (ACELF) offers two weeks of intensive training, which are open to adult instructors from across Canada. Local agencies make an effort to share and discuss their literacy training practices. In Quebec, the RGPAQ has offered training programs for the past five years to its member groups, in collaboration with a number of universities. With the exception of Quebec, everything is still in the embryonic stage.

Does instructor training receive all the attention it deserves? If not, how can we ensure that this issue becomes an integral part of the action plans of our organizations in future?

Elsewhere, if there is training, there is no documentation, or very little, of its objectives, content or results, and this prevents other agencies from adopting these or using them as models. That represents a loss of important expertise, given the limited resources available to local teams. In addition, when teaching material is produced for instructors, it is not accompanied by training and upgrading support. Hence much of this material is under-used, especially if it needs adaptation. Instructors end up left to their own devices as to the choice of material and how it is used.

How could we make better use of the informal training now being offered and the training material already available, including material from Quebec?

As mentioned above, literacy training is more difficult because it is largely provided by volunteers. According to a survey done in Ontario, the majority of instructors are women, generally over 35 years of age, and half of them are volunteers;[60] this is probably even more true in the smaller minority communities. The volunteer-based infrastructure is highly demanding and fragile; volunteers must constantly be recruited to lead literacy training activities, and these people themselves have to be trained. At the local level, the result at times is a lack of supervision, or even just poor results. Without adequate support or training, there is a risk of volunteers turning to more traditional teaching practices.

Is it possible to build structure into a training program if our work is being carried out mainly by volunteers? How do we ensure minimum training standards for volunteers? What key issues must be covered to prepare them for their work?

---

60. Pierre Leblanc (1992), *Recherche sur la formation et l'accréditation des alphabétiseurs en Ontario français.*

At present there is no recognized university training for qualifying as a literacy instructor. Universities are essentially centred on teaching young people within an academic framework. Many observers are concerned about the dangers of institutionalizing literacy training if some type of university instruction is made compulsory. However, a number of programs have been in existence during recent years in Quebec, including the literacy training certificate of the department of linguistics of the Université du Quebec à Montréal, and some graduate programs.

The Centre d'alphabétisation de Prescott (CAP) in Ontario, starting from research previously done[61] in that province, has developed and validated, in conjunction with the UQAM and many Francophone stakeholders in Canada, a list of skills essential for any French literacy instructor, and organized them by function and level of responsibility.[62] CAP is now collaborating on setting up a two-year college-level program at the Cité collégiale d'Ottawa, entitled "Techniques d'alphabétisation", which should be launched in 1997 in Ontario and possibly extended later to other parts of Canada. These are some initiatives to monitor closely if we are looking for practical experience to foster and enhance future training.

How do we take advantage of the work already done in the area of medium-length training for literacy instructors in Ontario? What can be learnt from this experience? How do we continue this work with participation of both university partners and people engaged in literacy training initiatives?

Instructor training is a critical development issue. It can consolidate the work teams and guarantee quality instruction, thereby increasing learners' chances of success. When teams are called on to take part in training sessions, they strengthen and enrich a common vision of their work. That offers fertile ground for other projects, like action research or developing teaching aids. The quality of this training lends the French literacy training movement greater credibility and an opportunity to improve and update its practices. Still, training must always remain a process of research that keeps close to practice and needs. Many subjects can be considered, either as content for longer training programs or as topics for casual discussion:

- a clear definition of literacy, and its usefulness for literacy training practices;
- defining literacy training in a cultural context;
- tying literacy training to refrancization;

---

61. *Ibid.*

62. See Serge Wagner (1996b), "Alphabétiser: une profession qui s'apprend?", *Ma place dans mon monde. Cahier spécial 96* (Vanier: FCAF), pp. 10-11 and 22.

- developing criteria for adapting teaching aids from elsewhere;
- ways to encourage reading and writing in French;
- a project-based approach to education;
- using group work and multi-level learning techniques

What training themes should be a priority? How do we ensure that the various training activities planned by groups are consistent and mutually enriching?

2.5 Linking literacy to other issues in francophone communities

'Literacy' should not be limited to the delivery of training services; projects should also contribute to strengthening the community. The role of training in the improvement of written language skills must be placed in a context. There are other key factors that contribute to improvement: varied and regular practice outside the academic setting, the positive example of an environment in which written material is regularly used, and conditions that encourage more regular practice (the fact of holding a job, or taking part in social activities).

The connection between literacy education and other social issues is an element in many literacy training initiatives, and one that has to be maintained and reinforced. We have seen from numerous studies, and more recently from the results of the IALS, that there are manifold relationships between literacy and income, employment, social conditions, and educational attainment. Making connections to other issues helps to lift literacy training out of an environment that is strictly educational or tied to language teaching.

Positive results have already been achieved by incorporating literacy training into a broader structure of adult education in French. For example, on Prince Edward Island, a centre for French-language adult education has been established for the first time; its clients will be able to complete their training and possibly go on to study elsewhere. In New Brunswick, the Community Academic Services Programs (CASP) that was set up in local communities will be a medium for academic upgrading in French, from literacy training through to earning a high school diploma.

But it is also important to reach into fields beyond education. Many literacy training initiatives promote Acadian or Francophone culture. These include: a travelling museum exhibit (Manitoba), monologues broadcast on radio (Nova Scotia), publication of tales and legends (in the Western provinces), a project on the future of francophone culture (co-sponsored by the FCAF and the federal

Department of Canadian Heritage). A research project on the reading habits of Franco-Ontarians is also worthy of note, since it covers the reading habits of francophones generally, not just learners.[63]

Other, perhaps more unusual, ventures have been launched to uphold the rights of francophones with low literacy skills. For example, the FCAF submitted a brief in 1994 on the employment insurance bill, which had a concrete impact on many francophones with low literacy skills.[64] A project in Saskatchewan will be carried out in 1997 to improve service in French in the health field. Other links to community issues will be similarly strengthened, for example those with the FCFA du Canada on training and adjustment in the francophone labour force (see section 2.2).

These are all concrete examples of the connection between literacy training and the self-affirmation of a community. These projects are rooted more in the concept of "literacy" than in "literacy training". The more closely literacy training activities are connected to the life of a community, the more positively they will be viewed by francophones, and the more they will contribute to the community's vitality. Efforts to broaden literacy training also strengthen ties with other organizations, and in the long run to lead to more sharing of responsibility for literacy and literacy training (see section 2.7).

What are the most pressing problems affecting our communities in terms of employment, school drop-out rates, and living conditions? How can literacy training initiatives help to improve these conditions?

How can we publicize and increase positive initiatives linking literacy training to other social issues?

2.6 Improving the quality of research

We approach this issue with some observations on two issues: first, a few **general remarks** on research in the French language in Canada, and second, the problem of the limited **data on francophone literacy**.

There is still **little research into literacy training in French** in Canada. Research in French suffers from the weaknesses outlined at the 1995 NLS policy conversation on literacy research in Canada:

---

63. Christine Bernier and Simon Laflamme (1996), *Souvent... en français. Rapport de l'enquête sur les habitudes de lecture et d'écriture des francophones de l'Ontario*, Centre franco-ontarien de ressources en alphabétisation, Regroupement des groupes francophones d'alphabétisation populaire de l'Ontario (Sudbury: Laurentian University).

64. FCAF (1994), *Alphabétisation et sécurité sociale : deux outils intimement liés*, brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development (Vanier: FCAF).

little basic research, lack of common standards and isolation of researchers, no comprehensive overview of the work being produced, little communication between researchers and practitioners, and limited practical application of research findings.[65]

There are reasons for the limited amount of research in French: the complexity of a field that is still poorly defined, the lack of recognition for the people working in it and the tenuous status of their employment, the low value placed on research, limited participation by francophone universities, inadequate support structures, and the absence of solid policy in this field.[66] Literacy training is a practical field; university researchers prefer theoretical research, or research centred on children in school. On the whole, these researchers seem more interested in literacy training in the Third World or among Aboriginal peoples than among francophone minority communities at home.[67] What little research exists today comes mainly from the literacy training community; it is generally not widely distributed, has received little support from university researchers or specialists, and is not put to sufficient use. It seldom draws inspiration from recent innovative research in allied fields, and this restricts the breadth of studies. As a result, much of the published research lacks methodological rigour and depth; little known and little used, it has not been as effective in improving practice as it should have been.

Generally speaking, there is no master plan identifying priority research topics for francophones in minority communities. We should note, however, the positive initiative of FCAF, which set up an advisory committee in 1994 to guide its research activity; this committee suspended activities for a year before before it formulated the Fédération's evaluation project in 1995.[68]

In literacy training, is there a need for a joint research plan for francophones in minority communities? If so, what role should government agencies, associations and local groups play in developing such a plan?

On the whole, research is not a dynamic side of the work of local teams. The instructors feel swamped by their teaching and administrative tasks, have little time to read, and do not see the positive effects

---

65. See National Literacy Secretariat (1996), *Policy Conversation on Literacy Research, February 5-7, 1996, A Report* (Ottawa: NLS).

66. Serge Wagner (1989), "L'alphabétisation et la recherche en français au Canada," *Revue québécoise de psychologie*, vol. 10, no. 3: pp. 125-146.

67. Serge Wagner (1995), "Quêteux monté à joual? Alphabétisme et francophonie canadienne à l'extérieur du Québec: non pratiques et pratiques de recherche," *États généraux de la recherche sur la francophonie à l'extérieur du Québec. Actes du colloque* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press), pp. 116-131.

68. In 1997, the FCAF will be conducting two research projects: a report on practices and policies in French-language literacy training; and an analysis of the IALS data on francophones.

that research might have on their day-to-day work. It is even more difficult for the volunteers to initiate an action research project. The very concept of research is intimidating; it is often associated with intellectual work whose distance from practice impedes action. However, an action research initiative can provide a teaching team with ideas, lead it to do more reading, ask questions, and look for answers to those questions through observation of practices, for example. The prospect often finds local teams ill-equipped and uncertain where to turn for the support they need. In the course of establishing community groups in Ontario, however, a number of groups have been successful in adopting some simple and effective ways to initiate environmental research.[69]

Would it be useful to do more action research in local literacy training organizations? What are the obstacles? How could those initiatives be supported? Should community studies already done in Ontario (see above) be used to provide such support?

How can researchers in French-language universities get involved in encouraging and supporting research on literacy training?

In general, French-language research is a side of literacy training that has been neglected, because of a lack of time, resources and an understanding of its value in supporting practice. But this is a practical field that sits at the crossroads of a number of disciplines: sociology, linguistics, history, education, anthropology. We make little use of this fact. The weakness of research has negative impacts on the advancement of literacy training. We are not exploring the special nature of our work in minority communities, and are not benefiting from experiments undertaken elsewhere under similar conditions. Sometimes we lack the tools necessary to evaluate our work and adapt it to a community's needs. We do not learn from our mistakes about what we are doing. It is difficult to gauge the results of our work: have we succeeded in improving people's level of literacy? Under what conditions? All of this also has repercussions on the strength and credibility of the French literacy training movement. The challenge of the day is to improve the quality of research and develop an action plan. There is no lack of research topics to shed new light on the literacy status of francophones. Here are some of them:

- evaluation of literacy training practices in minority communities
- observation of the effects of bilingualism on loss of oral and written communication skills in the first language
- study of the impact of learners' previous education on the progress of their literacy training

---

69. Serge Wagner (1987), *Étude de milieu et analyse des besoins en alphabétisation des adultes*, Alphabétisation communautaire chez les Franco-Ontariens collection, No. 1 (Toronto: Literacy Ontario).

- description of the reading skills of francophone target groups
- description of factors affecting attitudes towards writing in minority communities;
- study and comparison of literacy training approaches in other minority communities (eg, Native communities, other countries).

What research themes, questions and topics do we consider to be priorities for developing literacy training in French in Canada?

One of the problems with this lack of research is that there is **little data available on the literacy skills and practices of francophones** in Canada, despite some advances noted in Statistics Canada's last two surveys on the subject. This lack of data does not apply only to literacy. We can cite three recent surveys by Statistics Canada: the survey on drop-outs,[70] the longitudinal survey on children[71] and the adult education survey.[72] Although these studies were designed to give as accurate a picture as possible of the situation in Canada, none of them sketches a portrait or presents data that relates to mother tongue.[73] This deficiency sometimes leads national organizations and governments to define policies without reference to difficulties specific to francophones, thus masking certain inequities for which, as a result, no solutions are contemplated.

Yet data on the French-speaking population is essential for francophone organizations if they are to build a research base, describe their reality, justify requests for support, or raise the consciousness of governments and the general public. Data provides weight to back up the francophone case with both media and politicians when they want to publicize or defend the French reality, or even to convince francophones of the benefits of education in French. Such data would be useful for government agencies in developing more effective strategies to promote literacy training in French or adopting affirmative action plans to bring the minorities up to speed. Francophone associations have been demanding data on their situation for a long time, and they make use of it when it is available.[74]

---

70. Statistics Canada (1993), *Leaving School: Results from a national survey comparing school leavers and high school graduates 18 to 20 years of age* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada).

71. Statistics Canada (1996), *Growing Up in Canada: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada).

72. Statistics Canada (1995), *The 1992 Adult Education and Training Survey* (Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada).

73. Most of these special Statistics Canada surveys draw their sample from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), a procedure which does not yield significant data on francophones outside of Quebec.

74. For example, see Maurice Beaudin and René Boudreau (1994), *État de la francophonie hors Québec en 1991*.

Thus far, minority francophones have had to rely solely on data on educational attainment to evaluate literacy levels,[75] and this is only a partial answer since literacy skills do not necessarily move in tandem with schooling. Nonetheless, the LSUDA results have been used, notably by the FCAF, New Brunswick and Quebec. The FCAF has applied to Statistics Canada to improve francophone representativeness in the surveys. According to its calculations, in order to obtain data on francophones outside Quebec, it would be necessary to inject about $200,000 more into the Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth and $1.5 million into the IALS.[76] The FCAF has not acted upon the recommendations in the Statistics Canada report, largely because of the substantial amounts of money at issue.

The fact remains that this poses a major problem for minority francophones. So far, literacy surveys in Canada have not looked at cultural issues or collected information on minority language groups. Echoing their American source, the methodology and instruments are designed in English and then translated. In planning the survey, mother tongue (like the language chosen for the test) becomes one variable among many for describing reading skills, and not an essential element of an understanding of literacy in Canada. It is therefore important, when a future survey of this kind is conducted, to incorporate the social and cultural dimensions of literacy, in order to present as complete a picture as possible of francophones outside Quebec.

However, the current IALS appears to offer some potential for francophones in minority communities. As part of studies to be published shortly by Statistics Canada, the FCAF will analyze the IALS data on francophones in light of cultural, social and geographic factors. Other studies should also be published on Franco-Ontarian adults and francophones in New Brunswick at the initiative of the respective provincial governments. The IALS questionnaire specifies a number of dimensions, such as language most often spoken at home, at work and in leisure activities, parents' education levels, reading and writing at work and in daily life, self-assessment of literacy, and certain aspects of family literacy training (children's attitudes toward reading, parents' evaluation of and satisfaction with their children's ability to read, ways to encourage reading at home, et al). Analysis of this data on francophones may shed more light on their literacy status.

It would also be interesting to compare francophones responding in French or in English, by age, sex, income and occupation, reading habits, et al. These are important variables for understanding real or perceived dangers of assimilation and for investigating the effects of language transfer on literacy. For

---

75. See Carmelle D'entremont (1990), *Le premier pas vers l'alphabétisation. L'éducation de base et le rattrapage scolaire dans le milieu acadien en Nouvelle-Écosse* (Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Job Training). This survey had very positive results, since the Department subsequently hired a provincial coordinator for development of francophone training activities. See also Bruno Ouellette (1990), *L'analphabétisme chez les Franco-Albertains* (Edmonton: University of Alberta).

76. Marc Lachance and Christel Lepetit (1994), *Enquête sur l'alphabétisation des francophones en milieu minoritaire. Étude de faisabilité*, draft (Hull: Statistics Canada, Special Surveys Group); report submitted to the FCAF.

example, according to preliminary data on the Franco-Ontarian sample,[77] the adults who responded to the IALS test in French were older, less likely to be in the labour market, and mainly women. What about those who answered in English? Are they more likely male, younger, more educated, more of a presence in the labour market? These results tend to confirm current perceptions, ie that the "mother" tongue is preserved chiefly by women, in the private world of the home. They indicate the threat of minority communities becoming progressively weaker, and they more accurately target the groups that will be offered refrancization activities (see section 2.3).

How should the methodology (questionnaire, sample design etc.) and data processing of Canadian literacy surveys be improved in the future to account for francophones from the outset, in order to learn more about their realities?

How might more qualitative research in minority communities make up for the lack of statistics and enhance the data available on educational attainment?

Finally, dissemination is a key aspect of a research strategy for literacy training in French. The poor dissemination of research was noted at the NLS policy conversation on research.[78] At the moment, there is a distribution centre in Ontario (the FORA centre) and a francophone component at the Alpha-Ontario resource centre. These partners should be carefully consulted, in order to prevent published research from being shelved or put to little practical use. Every organization engaged in research should also consider effective ways to publicize the results of its work, by arranging conferences, talks, articles and so on. The plan for dissemination of results should be given particular attention when research projects are being reviewed for possible grants.

2.7 Sharing responsibilities for literacy

Many partners can contribute to improving the situation of minority francophones with respect to literacy levels. We will examine three levels of partnership here: the francophone associations in minority communities, Quebec-based organizations, and the various levels of government.

The **francophone associations in minority communities** are lead partners in the promotion of francophone literacy. The ICEA's 1989 study pointed out the need for literacy training to be a primary

---

77. Government of Ontario, *Enquête internationale sur l'alphabétisation des adultes. Rapport sur la composante francophone de l'Ontario*, Ministry of Education and Training (in press).

78. National Literacy Secretariat (1996), *Policy Conversation on Literacy Research, February 5-7, 1996, A Report*.

concern for all francophone associations working in minority communities.[79] In many cases, these associations have helped to set up local, provincial and even national agencies dedicated to literacy training in French. The collaboration between literacy training groups and francophone partners in the provinces is generally good now; it must be maintained and strengthened. These groups are in more or less regular contact with associations of parents, youth and seniors, community radio stations, francophone newspapers, school boards, departmental coordinators or directors of francophone affairs. Such collaboration seems to be closer in small minority communities, and less extensive in New Brunswick or even Eastern Ontario, which have more French-speakers. The FCAF maintains relations with the FCFA du Canada and other national francophone associations concerned with women, youth and seniors.

However, many associations are highly focused on the political and legal struggle to secure and guarantee the right of children to be educated in French. This leaves them little time to defend adults' right to literacy training. Yet the two are closely linked. In theory, the recent victories on the administration of French-language schools should have a spillover effect on the right to education in French for adults. Otherwise, how can the francophone mother who received her education in English and who lacks confidence in her French skills help her child who attends a French school?

Furthermore, government budget cuts will have a negative impact on co-operation in the francophone communities. Many organizations will be forced to close their doors for lack of funding. Regional government structures will be dismantled or reduced. The new Canada-community agreements signed with all the provinces and territories will force organizations to share a reduced budget envelope, bringing the risk of inciting competition and a narrower delineation of mandates for each.

How much co-operation do we have with other francophone associations at the regional, provincial and national levels? Should this cooperation be strengthened in the future? In what ways?

Literacy training organizations should not be alone in demanding the right to literacy training in French. But the fact remains that an improvement in levels of education and literacy for francophones, while not the only factor in play, has a definite impact on their likelihood of getting or keeping a job, improving their income, helping their children with schoolwork, and taking part in social and community life. All of these things are closely bound together. But it seems that since the foundation of the FCAF, the issue of literacy training in French in minority communities has been progressively abandoned by associations such as the ICEA and the FCFA du Canada, which had been contributors to the growth of the French literacy training movement. Alliances and joint projects among groups have to be strengthened, so that we can move beyond the official discourse of support and make literacy a

---

79. Andrée Boucher (1989), *En toutes lettres et en français. L'analphabétisme et l'alphabétisation chez les francophones au Canada*, pp. 142-145.

community development issue for the entire community. This is the way for the literacy education movement to realize its greatest strength and relevance (see section 2.5).

By what means can political recognition of literacy training in French be made a key demand of the entire French-language movement in Canada, not just the FCAF and its members?

Which projects could we carry out together?

Quebec-based officials and organizations can also play a substantial role in supporting and enhancing literacy training initiatives in minority communities. The ties between Quebec and the Acadian and other francophone communities are many, complex and changing. Over the years a certain distance seems to have settled over the relationships, for various political and historical reasons. This has led to misunderstanding and a misreading of everyone's respective motivations. However there is a keen desire for closer relations and improved understanding, at least on the part of the minority francophones, as attested in one FCFA document:

> When we see a more universal French-speaking community developing around the world, one that is more respectful of its diversity, it is not unrealistic to think that Quebec could serve as a point of convergence for the francophone and Acadian communities of Canada and the US, in the same way as France is for the French-speaking communities of Europe and Africa. [...] As the brightest francophone beacon on the continent, Quebec could, if it chose, become the rallying point for the various communities and encourage the development and influence of French culture and language in North America.[80]

Such a *rapprochement* also seems to be a hope of the literacy training organizations, for consolidating practices in French; during the FCAF's evaluation exercise, those questioned expressed a desire to see Quebec-based organizations be more active and have more presence in the Fédération.[81] Quebec has developed a highly regarded expertise in the field of literacy education, in such areas as training, research, production of material, and approaches in adult education. What remains is for this expertise to be adapted to the needs and realities of minority francophones. Hence some consciousness-raising

---

80. Marie-Hélène Bergeron and Charlotte Ouellet (1993), *La francophonie canadienne ... un espace à reconnaître. Pour une politique de rapprochement entre le Québec et les communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada* (Ottawa: Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada), p. 25 [translation].

81. Barbara Losier (1996), *Évaluation de la Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français.*

work still has to be done to increase the level of collaboration between Quebec-based organizations and francophones in minority communities.

Nonetheless, we see some significant initiatives worthy of mention already, particularly between Quebec and French-speaking Ontario. For example, there is a joint study under way on the feasibility of setting up an electronic network for literacy training in French, sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Direction de la formation générale des adultes in the Quebec Ministry of Education. There are also service exchange agreements between resource centres in the two provinces. And in the development of proposals on training and accreditation of literacy instructors in Ontario, experiences in Quebec, Belgium and France have been used as models.[82]

We should also note the interprovincial exchange programs of the Government of Quebec, set up by its Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes (SAIC). Through its Direction des bureaux de coopération de la francophonie, the SAIC is responsible for administering a financial support program for French-speaking communities across Canada. The objectives of this program include supporting the cultural, social and economic vitality of francophone and Acadian communities and facilitating the delivery of projects directed at target clienteles, especially young people. Under this program, a project has been submitted to the SAIC office in Alberta to organize an exchange with officials from a Quebec school board on family literacy training. This offers potential for fruitful cooperation which is still being explored.

Is greater co-operation with Quebec-based organizations helpful in supporting literacy training in the French language in Canada? In what circumstances?

How can a national organization like the FCAF take advantage of Quebec's expertise in literacy training without losing sight of the problems specifically affecting minority communities?

Finally, **all levels of government** can usefully contribute to improving the literacy of Canada's francophones, even though literacy training essentially falls within provincial jurisdiction. Cities and municipalities can be highly valued partners at the local level. The concentration of francophones in some towns makes this kind of collaboration more opportune. Municipalities can co-operate in delivering projects that will promote reading in French, create a francophone section in a library, publicize a museum, and so forth. Municipal support can help extend the influence of activities based

---

82. Pierre Leblanc (1992), *Recherche sur la formation et l'accréditation des alphabétiseurs en Ontario français.*

in community centres or schools. These kinds of local support are common in France[83] and Belgium, which could be used as models.

Can the municipalities in our region play a role in supporting literacy training initiatives in French or in promoting literacy? What kind of role?

Obviously we cannot overlook the role of the provincial governments in supporting French literacy training, since this is one of their designated responsibilities. As we saw in section 2.1, the role of the provincial governments is first of all to acknowledge the distinctive character of literacy issues for francophones, and then to tailor solutions to them. However, with the exception of Ontario and New Brunswick (and to some degree Nova Scotia), where there are infrastructures and programs specially designed for and headed by francophones, direct provincial support for French literacy training is still very fragile. All of this has consequences for the long-term viability of the movement and even the continuing health of the francophone communities in these provinces.

How can we secure greater recognition of francophone literacy issues by the provincial authorities?

Finally, in the federal arena, the National Literacy Secretariat has for many years been a key player in ensuring the development of French literacy training in Canada, and this has contributed to a recognition of the political issue of literacy training for linguistic minorities. The NLS's interest in understanding the problems and needs of francophones is apparent, for example, in its efforts to start a process of reflection on the subject (of which this document is one result), and to help remedy the shortage of data by funding a portion of the oversampling of minority francophones during the IALS. Other federal departments could also be contributing to the advancement of francophone literacy: Health Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, and the Department of Canadian Heritage, whose mission is to protect and foster the development of linguistic minorities across Canada. We have already seen exchanges and co-operation, such as one project soon to be delivered by the FCAF and sponsored by Canadian Heritage. If they were more extensive, these ties could have a beneficial effect on literacy training initiatives, because the initiatives could be integrated into a broader policy of community support.

---

83. Where, for example, on the initiative of the Association française pour la lecture (AFL), "Reading Cities" have been created — summer reading camps that promote and encourage broader functional use of reading at the local level.

In what ways could the NLS, Canadian Heritage and other federal bodies be encouraged to increase their contributions to the advancement of literacy training for minority francophones in Canada?

▲▼▲

The issues we have raised in this document are not new. They reiterate or summarize realities that are well known to literacy training groups, and positions that have been heard or read over the past ten years from people dedicated to the development of literacy education in French in Canada.[84] The literacy levels of minority francophones are an even more obvious demonstration of the need to consider the cultural and social dimensions of the problem, and ultimately improve the situation. This is a question which must be of interest or concern to all players from groups and government that deal with French-speaking communities in Canada. Let us hope that these issues can now be explored and discussed by various decision-makers, and we can build a better base for the action that will be needed in the not very distant future.

84. See, among other documents, that by Serge Wagner, in collaboration with Pierre Grenier (1990), *Analphabétisme de minorité et alphabétisation d'affirmation nationale. À propos de l'Ontario français.*

CONCLUSION

Minority francophone populations are older and less well educated, and have lower literacy skills than their anglophone neighbours; the status of French is precarious in most provinces, rights to education in French are still embryonic, assimilation and language transfer are the subject of concern in many parts of Canada. In this context, how do we improve the literacy of minority francophones? How can we ensure that French survives outside of northern New Brunswick and a few core regions? To read and write their own language, people need opportunities to communicate in French not only at home, but with friends, at the bank, at work, and at school as well. That communication has to be real, effective, useful. Finally, communication has to be backed up by a diversity of cultural riches (books, newspapers, theatre, poetry) that serve to preserve a francophone identity.

These complex questions are of concern to all francophone groups; they are not peculiar to literacy training associations. Literacy simply goes to the heart of the problem, that of the survival of the living, written word, and ultimately the language itself. If we respond to these issues, we will be able to count on the persistent efforts of a great number of minority francophones to continue to live in French, despite the pitfalls and difficulties that this entails for their daily lives. In literacy training as in other matters, the minority status of francophones is not in itself an obstacle to dynamic projects, cultural success, or artistic expression in any of its forms, the enthusiasm of local sports teams, insistence on the right to self-expression in public, in one's own language and culture, with passion, determination and obstinacy, despite some real and substantial obstacles.

This discussion paper can be used to set various kinds of activities in motion. It can be assigned to be read in full as a backgrounder to a general discussion, or individual sections of it can be explored in greater depth. A local work team could use it to investigate the significance of action taken and to more clearly plan initiatives for the future in training, research, or intervention with learners. The document might also spur discussion in provincial or national francophone associations, to make them more aware of their responsibilities in the area of literacy, or to better situate action plans in this area. Similarly, it could also be used to increase the awareness of representatives of provincial or federal agencies who have to deal with these issues. One way or another, this paper will have achieved its purpose if it contributes to reaching consensus on key elements for supporting literacy and literacy training in the French language in Canada.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario (1994). *Les réalités franco-ontariennes. Les francophones tels qu'ils sont*, 3rd edition. Vanier, ON: ACFO.

Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario (1985). *Les Francophones tels qu'ils sont. Regard sur le monde du travail franco-ontarien.* Vanier, ON: ACFO.

Beaudin, Maurice, and René Boudreau (1994). *État de la francophonie hors Quebec en 1991.* Moncton: for the Comité d'adaptation des ressources humaines de la francophonie canadienne, FCFA du Canada.

Bergeron, Marie-Hélène, and Charlotte Ouellet (1993). *La francophonie canadienne... un espace à reconnaître. Pour une politique de rapprochement entre le Québec et les communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.* Ottawa: Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Bernier, Christine, and Simon Laflamme (1996). *Souvent... en français. Rapport de l'enquête sur les habitudes de lecture and d'écriture des francophones de l'Ontario.* Centre franco-ontarien de ressources en alphabétisation, Regroupement des groupes francophones d'alphabétisation populaire de l'Ontario. Sudbury: Laurentian University.

Boucher, Andrée (1989). *En toutes lettres et en français. L'analphabétisme et l'alphabétisation chez les francophones au Canada.* Montreal: Institut canadien de l'éducation des adultes.

Cardinal, Linda (1997). "Les Franco-Ontariens contrôleront-ils vraiment leurs écoles?" *Le Devoir*, January 30, p. A–7.

Castonguay, Charles (1983). *L'évolution de l'exogamie et des incidences sur les transferts linguistiques chez les populations provinciales de langue française au Canada entre 1971 et 1981.* Quebec City: Conseil de la langue française.

Churchill, Stacy, Normand Frenette and Saeed Quazi (1985). *Éducations et besoins des Franco-ontariens. Le diagnostic d'un système d'éducation*, Vol. 1. Toronto.

Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (1988). *Adult Illiteracy in Canada.* Toronto.

Creative Research Group (1987a). *Literacy in Canada: a research report.* Ottawa: Southam News.

Creative Research Group (1987b). *L'analphabétisme au Quebec. Rapport d'enquête*. Ottawa: Southam News, for the Government of Quebec, ministère de l'Éducation.

D'entremont, Carmelle (1990). *Le premier pas vers l'alphabétisation. L'éducation de base et le rattrapage scolaire dans le milieu acadien en Nouvelle-Écosse*. Nova Scotia Department of Advanced Education and Job Training.

Ducharme, Jean-Charles (1996). *New Canadian Perspectives. Status report: Minority-language educational rights.* Ottawa: Department of Canadian Heritage.

Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français (1994). *Alphabétisation et sécurité sociale: deux outils intimement liés.* Brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development. Vanier, ON: FCAF.

Fédération des francophones hors Québec (1983). *Analphabétisme chez les francophones hors Québec.* Report of a mini-seminar on illiteracy and approaches to literacy training, held in Val Morin, March 28, 29 and 30, 1983. Ottawa: FFHQ.

Godbout, Marc (1995). *Plan directeur de la main-d'œuvre de la francophonie canadienne.* N.p., for the Comité d'adaptation des ressources humaines de la francophonie canadienne, FCFA du Canada.

Government of Ontario. *Enquête internationale sur l'alphabétisation des adultes. Rapport sur la composante francophone de l'Ontario.* Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (in press).

Harrison, Brian R. (1996). *Youth in official language minorities, 1971-1991*, Catalogue no. 91-545. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Demography Division.

Jones, Stan, et al. (1996). *Reading the future: a portrait of literacy in Canada.* Catalogue no. 89-551-XPE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Human Resources Development Canada, National Literacy Secretariat.

Laberge, Yvon (1994). *L'alphabétisation familiale en français. Une démarche à reconnaître, des liens à définir.* First version. N.p.: FCAF.

Lachance, Marc, and Christel Lepetit (1994). *Enquête sur l'alphabétisation des francophones en milieu minoritaire. Étude de faisabilité.* Draft. Hull: Statistics Canada, Special Surveys Group. Report submitted to the FCAF.

Lachapelle, Réjean, and Jacques Henripin (1980). *The Demographic Situation in Canada.* Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

Leblanc, Pierre (1992). *Recherche sur la formation et l'accréditation des alphabétiseurs en Ontario français.* N.p.: Government of Ontario, Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch.

Le Droit (1996). "En Ontario, l'analphabétisme demeure inquiétant." Ottawa, September 9.

Literacy New Brunswick Inc. (1995). *L'initiative d'alphabétisation au Nouveau-Brunswick.* Fredericton: Literacy New Brunswick Inc.

Losier, Barbara (1996). *Évaluation de la Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français.* Hull: FCAF.

Losier, Barbara (1995). *Alpha-Boulot.* Project developed for the International Year of Tolerance. Hull: FCAF.

Montpetit, Caroline (1996). "Les écoles francophones hors Quebec sont sous-financées." *Le Devoir*, November 11, p. A–2.

Mougeon, Raymond (1989). "Scolarisation en français sans maintien de cette langue au foyer: impact sur la compétence en français parlé." Paper presented at the symposium "Regard sur le jeune Franco-Ontarien," University of Ottawa.

National Literacy Secretariat (1996). *Policy Conversation on Literacy Research, February 5-7, 1996, A Report.* Ottawa: NLS.

National Literacy Secretariat (1995). *Evaluation of the National Literacy Secretariat. Evaluation and Data Development.* Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.

Ontario Training and Adjustment Board (1995). *Adult Literacy Education in Ontario: An Information Guide.* Toronto.

Ouellette, Bruno (1990). *L'analphabétisme chez les Franco-Albertains.* Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Program Development and Evaluation Branch (1983). *A Second Chance: Literacy in New Brunswick.* New Brunswick Department of Advanced Education and Training.

Roy, Sylvie (1996). *Enseignement et apprentissage de la lecture en alphabétisation. Module d'autoperfectionnement à l'intention du personnel enseignant.* Montreal: Table de concertation en alphabétisation de Montréal.

Roy, Sylvie (1995). "Bilan d'une belle tournée." *Bulletin A à Z*, vol. 1, No. 2 (December).

Roy, Sylvie, and Hélène Tremblay (1994). *Prévention de l'analphabétisme et alphabétisation familiale. Document 1 : notes et réflexions à partir de trois conférences.* Longueuil: Commission scolaire Jacques-Cartier and Direction de la formation générale des adultes.

Roy, Sylvie, with Isabelle Gobeil (1993). *Les capacités de lecture des Québécoises et des Québécois. Résultats d'une enquête canadienne.* Corrected edition. Quebec City: Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction de la formation générale des adultes.

Statistics Canada (1996). *Growing Up in Canada: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth.* Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada (1995). *The 1992 Adult Education and Training Survey.* Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada.

Statistics Canada (1993). *Leaving School: Results from a national survey comparing school leavers and high school graduates 18 to 20 years of age,* Catalogue no. 81-575-XPE. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

Statistics Canada (1991). *Adult Literacy in Canada: results of a national study,* Catalogue no. 89-525-XPE. Ottawa: Minister of Industry, Science and Technology.

Statistics Canada and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (1995). *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the first International Adult Literacy Survey.* Ottawa: Statistics Canada and Paris: OECD.

Wagner, Serge (1996a). *Alphabétisme et alphabétisation en français au Canada. Étude préliminaire dans le contexte de l'Enquête internationale sur l'alphabétisation des adultes (EIAA).* Discussion paper by FCAF for Statistics Canada. Hull: FCAF.

Wagner, Serge (1996b). "Alphabétiser: une profession qui s'apprend?" Ma place dans mon monde. Cahier spécial 96. Vanier: FCAF, p. 10-11 and 22.

Wagner, Serge (1995). "Quêteux monté à joual? Alphabétisme et francophonie canadienne à l'extérieur du Québec: non pratiques and pratiques de recherche." *États généraux de la recherche sur la francophonie à l'extérieur du Québec. Actes du colloque*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, p. 116-131.

Wagner, Serge (1990). "Alphabétisation et assimilation des minorités au Canada: le cas des francophones au Canada." In *ALPHA 90, recherches en alphabétisation*, edited by J.-P. Hautecœur. Quebec City: MEQ, p. 55-84.

Wagner, Serge, with Pierre Grenier (1990). *Analphabétisme de minorité et alphabétisation d'affirmation nationale. À propos de l'Ontario français*. Vol. 1: Synthèse théorique et historique. Alpha communautaire chez les Franco-Ontariens collection. Ottawa: Mutual Press.

Wagner, Serge (1989). "L'alphabétisation et la recherche en français au Canada." *Revue québécoise de psychologie*, 10, 3: 125-146.

Wagner, Serge (1987). *Étude de milieu et analyse des besoins en alphabétisation des adultes*. Alpha communautaire chez les Franco-Ontariens collection, No. 1. Toronto: Literacy Ontario.